

The Guardian Weekly

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Fear is the key to Major's campaign

Michael White

JOHN MAJOR and Tony Blair on Monday set a frantic pace for the longest election campaign in modern British history when they traded blows on the hustings of Middle England within hours of the Prime Minister's announcement of a May Day election.

By the time Mr Major returned from informing the Queen of his intention to dispatch MPs to their constituencies for a campaign lasting until May 1, the Labour leader was already canvassing in a south London primary school.

After bringing his soapbox, talisman of his unexpected win in 1992, back to face hecklers again in highly marginal Luton, Mr Major issued a statement warning voters that their choice was Safety First with the Tories — or "a leap in the dark with a party you don't know and which doesn't want you to know what its policies are".

Twenty points behind in most polls, Mr Major knows that fear is his best, slender hope of snatching a fifth Tory term. Labour strategists are equally aware that the election is theirs to lose by a careless word.

In a move that deepened Conservative gloom, the Murdoch-owned Sun, Britain's biggest-selling newspaper, told its readers on Tuesday to vote Labour, switching sides after more than 20 years of unswerving support for the Tories.

In a front-page editorial headlined "The Sun Backs Blair", the paper, which has a daily readership of more than 10 million, says Mr Blair is the "breath of fresh air" that Britain needs. The Tories are "tired, divided and rudderless" and no longer deserve support.

For the first time the party leaders are planning to hold presidential-style TV debates, but they are still wrangling over the conditions and whether to include the Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown.

Hugo Young writes: This is going to be the strangest election of modern times. In all the elections I can remember, there has been a substantial element of excitement. At every stage, from the naming of the day to the counting of the votes, genuine uncertainty abounded. In 1997, we have been reading the writing on the wall for three years.

The strangeness begins with the date — May 1. As the five-year mandate ran towards its inevitable expiry, and the options for a date closed down week by week, the discussion was still being conducted as though Mr Major had the usual massive range of choices. It was a fatuous and bogus debate that pretended that this was a normal election. But it is not a normal election.

The campaign has been going on a long time. This, again, is aberrant. Within months of Tony Blair becoming Labour's leader, it became apparent what sort of pitch he was going to make. Labour's positioning has been going on, with great consistency, for more than two years.

The Tories have been doing little except electioneering for most of the past year. Both on Europe and in its legislative programme, which has been ridiculously dominated by any law-and-order extravaganza the Home Secretary can dream up, responsible government was long ago superseded by electioneering.

All the outward evidence suggests an extraordinary solidity of opinion. One needs to be a champion cynic about opinion polls to doubt the meaning of Labour's steady lead, 20 per cent or more, for at least three years.

This large fact is beginning to impress itself on the assumptions of a great many Tory politicians. Talking to several of them last weekend, I found their capacity to put the words round statements of the usual professional optimism to be sadly depleted. All were much more interested in their place in the pecking-order of catastrophe, reckoning how large a Labour swing their own seat could survive, than they were in speculating about five more years of John Major.

The Labour party's prime anxiety, as it cruises towards victory, is to reassure the people that little will change. There have been 18 years of failure, but we do not intend, they say, to dismantle the pillars that Mrs Thatcher built. The country is about to vote for change, yet Mr Blair speaks more specifically for the absence of fear than the presence of vision.

Without such reassurance, the country might not vote Labour at all. That's why this election is so weird, so very much not 1945 or 1964 or 1979, and yet maybe, on the swings and roundabouts, bigger.

Austin

I CAN HONESTLY SAY WE'RE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT JOBS.

Simon Hoggart, page 12
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Israeli schoolgirls in the town of Beit Shemesh grieve for their seven friends shot dead and the six wounded by a Jordanian soldier last week during a school outing to the Jordanian border region. The soldier, identified as Ahmed Moussa, aged 26, was arrested. King Hussein of Jordan later made a visit of condolence to the bereaved families. Meanwhile Israeli troops in riot gear took up position at the Har Homa site, East Jerusalem, where a new Jewish settlement is about to be built PHOTO: YOAV LEMMER

Rebel victory dooms Mobutu

Chris McGreal in Kinshasa

AN AIR of doom has settled on Zaire's beleaguered regime after the lightning rebel seizure of the key city of Kisangani last weekend and the insurgents' threat to go all the way to the capital unless the government negotiates itself into oblivion.

As if to reinforce the sense of the old system's inevitable collapse, President Mobutu Sésé Séko called off plans to fly home this week from France, where he has spent most of the five-month civil war recuperating from cancer.

The government appears paralysed by the loss of Zaire's third-largest city — the base for the army's operations against the rebels. A cabinet meeting, held as Kisangani fell, decided nothing more significant than to dismiss the public works minister for publicly criticising the misappropriation of government funds.

News of the rebel victory was generally greeted with quiet satisfaction on the capital's streets. But few believe they will have to wait for the rebels to march into Kinshasa before the regime tumbles.

Some senior politicians privately speculate that unless the government takes a bold step, such as direct negotiations with the rebels, a military coup may result.

The rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire now controls as much as one-quarter of Zaire. Its leader, Laurent Kabila, said that in the absence of talks he would send his forces on toward Kinshasa. "We are still advancing, we must liberate the whole country . . . we are going everywhere," he said.

The fall of Kisangani demonstrated clearly that the alliance is unlikely to face any serious obstacles as it sweeps further west.

The government's deployment of top generals — including the army chief of staff, tons of new weapons, Russian-made bombers and helicopter gunships, and hundreds of foreign mercenaries — barely hindered the rebels once they decided to take the city. Resistance collapsed, and the rebels seized control in less than a day.

Hostility between the army and government is increasingly open. Generals have complained publicly about the administration's failure to give them the means to defeat the rebels. The prime minister, Kengo wa Dondo, responded with the old axiom about there being no bad soldiers, only bad generals.

The near-complete collapse of the government's military strategy leaves it with few battlefield options, while Mr Kabila has a variety. The rebels could press on directly to Kinshasa. But it is a 1,200-km trek, much of it along dilapidated roads through thick rain forest. And there are juicier targets.

Rebel forces are pushing ever closer to Mbuji-Mayi, the city at the heart of Zaire's diamond industry, which would be a major prize. They are also penetrating deeper into mineral-rich Shaba, Mr Kabila's home province.

The rebels have again rejected an early ceasefire. "Negotiations have to precede a cessation of hostilities," Mr Kabila said.

Washington Post, page 19

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK18	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 450	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.90

Yet more dirt dished up on meat hygiene

THE suppression by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Maff) of the report on soiled meat in abattoirs represents another nail in the Government's DIY coffin (*E. coli* warning suppressed, March 16).

Although this is only the latest episode in the catalogue of sleaze and cover-ups that has characterised the Tory administration in recent times, it demonstrates the development within the Tory party élite of a culture of cover-up and denial. Witness Nicholas Soames's cornered animal behaviour over the use of organophosphates in the Gulf war.

My fear is that this culture may prove endemic to the British system of government as a whole. Labour, if it wins, must prove otherwise by implementing a Freedom of Information Act.

Paul Cumberland,
University of Cambridge, Cambridge

WE share your concern at Maff putting producer interests before those of consumers (Editorial, March 16). For eight years, the council has been pressing for the creation of a separate and independent food agency to protect the interests of consumers. The recent furore over *E. coli* in meat and standards of hygiene in abattoirs further strengthens our case.

Clearly, Maff can no longer justify its role as the representative of several conflicting interests. The consumer interest is too often last in line. And as the events of the last few days show, the openness and transparency of current arrangements leave a lot to be desired.

If consumers are to be protected and standards of public health sustained, it is essential that any newly created food agency works openly to anticipate and prevent problems, rather than to react after the damage is done. It should be a source of unbiased information and advice for consumers. It should have responsibility for food regulation and for ensuring that proper inspection mechanisms are in place. It must be given the resources to carry out its work and the authority to fulfil its task. And it must enjoy complete freedom to set its own research agenda, to publish its findings and to talk to the media.

Ruth Evans,
Director, National Consumer Council, London

ARE we really asked to believe that the findings of a major and costly report affecting the health of the nation was not communicated to ministers, because it was a "working document" and ministers are responsible for policy but not for implementation? In what private enterprise would managers not follow through implementation as part of policy? In what local government would such a vast sum be spent with no accountability on a mere "working document"?

(Rev) Ian Stubbs,
Denshaw, Oldham

SLAUGHTERHOUSE filth cannot be eradicated, no matter how many investigators or reports commissioned (suppressed or otherwise). Each year in the UK alone, approximately 700 million poultry, 18 million pigs, 18 million sheep and 8 million cattle, defecating and urinating in fear and stress, are taken from intensive farms to slaughter. No way can this work in either humans' or animals' interest.

People want "cheap" meat — at whatever cost. So the intensive farming, marketing and slaughtering of food animals will go on causing ever more meat-related diseases such as BSE, *E. coli* and salmonella.

Sam Starkey,
Tonbridge, Kent

Faith in numbers

RE "New figures question religious revival" (February 16) I feel I should congratulate you on what was, to me, a well-written and balanced article on a rather ticklish subject. There are, however, a few points that I wish to make.

First, it must be emphasised that the recently produced figures are only concerned with the Church of England, not with other denominations, many of which have seen recent attendance increases. There are several reasons for this. The Anglican Church is probably the most conservative of the Protestant denominations, which results in a non-progressive and uncomfortable style of service.

Second, with reference to so-called "rave-in-the-nave" services — in itself something of a misnomer — while mistakes were made with the Nine O'Clock Service, the vast majority of modern, progressive or alternative worship is truly evangelical. It achieves the aim of reaching people to whom, as shown by statistics, chilly pews and traditionalism do not appeal. This is not the worship of "candy floss idols" or in any way degrading God: rather it is spreading the Christian message in a way that appeals to people of our turn-of-the-century culture. It is perhaps significant of the wide need for Christianity in Britain that it is only when one mismanaged service gets into trouble that any attention is paid to what is an otherwise successful movement, and that the attention is mostly negative.

William Perry,
Fulda, Germany

I WAS amazed that Douglas Farah could write about the renaissance of the Church in Cuba (Church Comeback in Changing Cuba, February 16) without mentioning the Protestant Cuban Ecumenical Council. It was the CEC's close relationship with the US Pastors for Peace that did much to break the US blockade of humanitarian assistance to Cuba.

Their "little yellow school bus" and Laredo, Texas, hunger strike led Cuban news stories nightly for weeks in the summer of 1993, showing that progressive Christians would stand in solidarity with Cuba and helped to persuade the island's Communist Party to allow Christians to become members and stand for election.

Bob Thomson,
Ottawa, Canada

A long-term view on life

YOUR article (Britain to squeeze student numbers, February 16) made my jaw drop. Doesn't the Department for Education know that further and higher education not only equip students for the workplace but educate them so that they can take a broader view of life and can make a better contribution to society.

For example, fine art students, sculptors and painters never have a job to go to and not more than a handful will earn a living from their works, but their contribution to the culture of our society, through observation, reflection and visual comment, is inestimable. Further, a well-educated population would be able to see through this latest proposal for the scam that it is . . . ah, now I begin to see!

Dick Coles,
Saône-et-Loire, France

I WAS shocked to see that Martin Woollacott (Many graduates make light work, February 16) does not understand economic decision-making. "Those with two years of college education earn a quarter of a million dollars more over their lifetimes than those who never went to college. So, if you take away the cost of even the most expensive college, you are still left with a clear average profit of, say, $150,000."

What about the opportunity costs? If instead of going to college I invest my $100,000 (admittedly an over-estimate of the costs of a two-year college course) at a modest 6 per cent, I would make $6,000 per year in interest, almost exactly the value of the quarter million spread over a working life of 40 years. And I would still have $100,000 in the bank for my retirement. After incorporating the effect of progressive taxation, anyone investing their $100,000 in a college must either be in need of the type of education apparently denied your reporters, or must understand that the "value" of education goes well beyond the purely monetary.

Graham Andrews,
Gresham, Oregon, USA

Time to think again on drugs

I AGREE with Stephen S. Rosenfeld's article (Drug war: the enemy within, March 16) in that: "It is a good time to see a strong case being made for doing things differently."

Clearly, Prohibition did not work during the "bootlegging" days, in the United States. Nor is it working today with regard to drugs. As in Australia, the drug problem — in particular the heroin problem — did not happen overnight. It has taken around 25 years to reach the stage we are now at. Throwing vast sums of money at the problem, via law enforcement and increasing penalties for traffickers, is just not working.

Our state police commissioner and the incumbent director of public prosecutions have expressed the opinion that trials should be carried out supplying heroin to registered addicts under strict government control. Surely, if the addict is able to satisfy the need for the narcotic, this will greatly reduce crime rates and eradicate the huge profits made by the gangsters who continue to run the risks and trade in these substances.

It is about time the world recognises that prohibition is just not working. The funds saved would be better directed to hospitals, educating youngsters about the dangers of drugs, and maybe even giving the police a rise.

Stephen M Lane,
Sydney, Australia

Briefly

YOU seem to print a lot of correspondence critical of Robert Lacville, portraying him as the archetype of the smug, reactionary European columnist.

For all I know that's exactly what he is. Fortunately, however, his writing displays something that his critics so signally lack — a good sense of humour. His contributions to the Guardian Weekly are quirky, penetrating, and above all entertaining. What's more, he clearly has a warm regard for the people that he lives among as a foreigner.

Lacville represents nothing other than himself, and I am sure that for the silent majority of your readers that is quite good enough.

Christopher MacDonald,
Taipei, Taiwan

IT IS not only its racist policy that is making the National Front so popular (National affront, February 23). Every time there is a recidivist sex crime such as the recent rape and murder of four girls at Boulogne-sur-mer, I hear people all around me saying the only solution is to bring back capital punishment — and of course, that is exactly what the National Front proposes to do if it gets into power.

Stephenie Beryman,
Ollioules, Var, France

THE Korean corruption you document (Kim apologises for scandal, March 2) is a major problem at every level of Korean life to the point it is now another Korean export industry, to judge by the conduct of Korean tour companies abroad.

In New Zealand, Korean tour companies stand accused of demanding kickbacks from local tourist businesses before Korean tourists will use their services. Worse, some Korean tour guides are accused of demanding discounts for Korean tour parties, then charging their clients the full price and pocketing the difference.

David Smith,
Nairobi, Kenya

FURTHER to Paddy Welsh's report from Managua (March 2), certainly those in the United States who directed the war crimes against Nicaragua during the 1980s have yet to be brought to justice. Ronald Reagan enjoys freedom from prosecution as any retired Roman emperor would; so evidently do his henchmen, such as Elliot Abrams and Patrick Buchanan, who developed such "bad backs" during the Vietnam misadventure (much as Reagan had during the second world war) but suffered no compunction over having others carrying out the carnage in a non-gringo population.

Robert MacLeod,
Sirdar, BC, Canada

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Albanian leader losing grip on power

Joanna Robertson and John Sweeney in Tirana

POWER continued to flow away from President Sali Berisha of Albania this week as his rival, Fatos Nano, emerged from hiding and four years in prison to give a convincing performance as a leader in waiting.

The contrast with Mr Berisha could not have been more stark. The widely despised president is holed up in his palace on the hill overlooking Tirana, guarded night and day by troops and secret police, and has all but disappeared from public view.

The headquarters of the Socialist party (which changed its name from the Communist party in 1991) was awash on Monday with a crowd of earnest faces pressing against the gates.

Mr Nano was released from Tirana prison last week — "a place where if you became scared you just could not survive," he said.

The leader of the Socialist Party and Albania's interim prime minister in 1991 after the rebellion against the communist dictatorship, Mr Nano sent a pacifying message to the Albanian people. "I want to convert my party into a peacemaking and peacekeeping force," he said. "I am from the south, but my best friends are in the north." He stressed his support for the new government of reconciliation.

Asked whether he would meet Mr Berisha, he said: "I will shake hands with him, not as president but as an Albanian citizen. He should not step down, but aside," an elegant distinction which allows Mr Berisha a little dignity.

Last week hundreds of frightened Westerners were evacuated under fire from Albania as anarchy gripped the country, gunmen roamed the streets of the capital Tirana, and a beleaguered President Berisha clung desperately to power.

Last Sunday, amid chaotic scenes, United States marines swooped on to the beach at Durres to evacuate foreign nationals as thousands of Albanians thronged the port, trying to flee their country. Earlier, police fired on the crowd, reportedly killing two.

The evacuation of Turkish nationals from Durres ran into trouble when Albanians seized landing craft, leaving the foreigners stranded. US marines were alerted and two helicopters landed on the sand while others circled overhead. Marines used rifle butts to beat off Albanians trying to board the aircraft.

More than 1,000 Albanians tried to storm their way into the heavily guarded docks earlier in the day. Police fired long bursts from automatic weapons and clubbed some of the crowd, forcing them back into the centre of town. This was the latest in a series of clashes between civilians and police in recent days, in which four people are known to have died.

Albanians took to the sea in a ramshackle flotilla of rusting gunboats and fishing vessels. Beginning on Friday last week, thousands of Albanians have landed in tatty tugs and battered frigates at the Italian port of Brindisi. In the past few days, officials estimate that around 6,000 bedraggled and dazed Albanians have fled to southern Italy. Many are lone children put on boats by desperate parents.

On Monday, Italian coastguards rescued about 900 refugees from a stricken frigate after it ran out of fuel and began to take in water, about 35km off Brindisi.

"They are very nervous, scuffles have been erupting amongst them, so I also sent out a boat of Italian marines as well as food and water to be certain they would keep quiet," said the head of Italy's coastguard, Admiral Renato Ferraro.

Last week Italian authorities confiscated hundreds of Kalashnikovs and cases of ammunition from at least 14 Albanian military ships that sailed into the port of Otranto.

Meanwhile a high-level European assessment team arrived in Albania on Monday for talks on how to help the new broad-based government end the anarchy in the Balkan state. The 11-strong team, led by Dutch roving ambassador Jan de Marchant et d'Ansembourg, flew into Tirana by Italian military helicopter from Brindisi.

A frantic Albanian couple try to carry their children to safety last weekend as police fire guns to disperse a crowd that stormed the port of Durres PHOTOGRAPH: YANNIS BEHRAKIS

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Le Monde, page 17

200 French paedophiles held

Alex Duval Smith in Paris

FRENCH police who last week detained more than 200 people linked to a child pornography ring said some of the 5,000 video cassettes they seized featured footage of babies submitted to sexual acts.

Police in Nice, who spearheaded the five-month nationwide police operation, said that among those detained were five school teachers, two head teachers, members of the judiciary and a television journalist.

They are suspected of buying or helping to distribute pornographic films featuring children aged between six months and 15 years.

Commandant Gens of the Nice gendarmerie told French television: "The tapes are very upsetting, quite atrocious. We have located some of the people who made the films, including one man who filmed his girlfriend's daughter without her knowledge.

"Some of the paedophile footage is camouflaged within ordinary X-rated films. The children are European girls and boys, filmed together and sometimes with adults." He said tapes with a child-pornography content were sold for between $75 and $110 each.

The Nice police were at pains to point out that the detained adults — apprehended in almost every French *département* — were from all social backgrounds. They were mostly married men.

Colonel Podevin of the Nice police told France-Info radio: "No social class has been spared. The suspects are chiefly married professional men. Some allegedly made the tapes, others distributed them and some were subscribers."

The police operation, involving 600 officers across France, began last October when a shopkeeper in Saintes, in the Charentes-Maritime *département*, was brought in for questioning by the Nice investigating magistrate, Jean-Pierre Rousseau.

The magistrate discovered that the child-pornography ring was being run through two servers on the Minitel — a French online system similar to the Internet. Three men linked to distributing the tapes were arrested in January.

UK paedophile ring, page 10

Ex-rebels take capital

Phil Gunson

FORMER guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) on Monday celebrated a feat that eluded them in more than 10 years of civil war in El Salvador — the seizure of the capital.

Even before the vote count from last Sunday's parliamentary and local elections was complete the outgoing mayor of San Salvador, Mario Valiente of the rightwing ruling Arena party, recognised the victory of the FMLN-led coalition's candidate, Héctor Silva, a 49-year-old doctor.

The two parties were neck-and-neck in the congressional race, with the FMLN on course to at least double its presence in the 82-seat house to about 28 deputies.

The leftwing former rebels gave up their arms five years ago. The FMLN has abandoned its marxist rhetoric and describes itself as social democrat. But the results of the poll mark the most important electoral advance for the left in Central America this decade.

However, neither the FMLN nor Arena is likely to win a majority, and the smaller parties lean to the right, making it unlikely that the front will challenge government control of congress.

A former guerrilla commander, Shafick Handal, described the FMLN's sweeping victories, which included many important provincial cities, as "a very important message for the democratisation process".

It is the second time Salvadoreans have gone to the polls since the civil war ended in December 1992. Arena's Armando Calderón Sol won the presidency in 1994, and his term runs until 1999.

The leader of Arena, Gloria Salguero, downplayed the result, which was marred by an abstention rate of more than 60 per cent. She said that the party's voters had stayed away out of "an excess of confidence".

The campaign leading up to the polls was bitter, including stone-throwing and the unexplained death of a 17-year-old FMLN activist in a grenade explosion.

As in 1994, there were accusations of fraud levelled at the ruling party. In Ilopango, near the capital, ballot boxes stuffed with Arena votes were allegedly found before the polls opened, while in many areas the ruling party handed out propaganda and free food.

But the electoral tribunal chairman, Jorge Díaz, said that despite "certain inconveniences" the overall process had been clean.

The Week

NIGERIA'S exiled Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, and 11 other dissidents were charged with treason by the military government in Lagos over a spate of recent bomb blasts in the country. They face the death penalty if convicted. Comment, page 14

MOTHER Teresa's Missionaries of Charity elected a 63-year-old Indian, Sister Nirmala, as her successor. But their founder will continue to guide the order despite old age and frail health. Washington Post, page 20

ALEXANDER Feklisov, a former KGB agent, resolved one of the most emotive controversies of cold war history by confirming that Julius Rosenberg, executed with his wife for espionage in 1953, was a Soviet spy.

MARY ROBINSON, the Irish president, ended months of speculation by announcing that she will not seek re-election when her seven-year term ends in November.

PRESIDENT Clinton is expected to act swiftly to designate a new CIA director after the sudden withdrawal of his first nominee for the post, former national security adviser Anthony Lake.

AN IRANIAN military plane with 86 people on board crashed in a mountainous region in the northeast of the country. There was no news of survivors.

SOUTH African anti-apartheid activist Allan Boesak said he was innocent after his appearance in court in Cape Town on 30 charges involving more than $225,000 of foreign aid.

EUROPEAN Union governments launched a campaign to quash mounting speculation that the planned date for monetary union, January 1999, could be delayed by Germany's growing economic problems. Finance, page 16

THE authorities in Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, arrested five people after foiling an attempt to assassinate the military leader, Major Pierre Buyoya, a government spokesman said.

WANDA KOOLMATRIE, an acclaimed "Aboriginal" woman author, owned up to being Leon Carmen, a white male writer, embarrassing Australia's arts establishment already smarting from earlier ethnic hoaxes.

VICTOR VASARELY, often called the master of Op Art, has died of cancer in Paris at the age of 90. His last years were clouded by controversy over the collapse of the foundation set up in his name in 1971.

Reformers take charge in Kremlin

David Hearst in Moscow

IN HIS most sweeping government changes since he started his radical reform programme five years ago, President Boris Yeltsin announced a new senior cabinet on Monday composed of young reformers who, he said, would lead the charge against former Soviet monopolies and begin fundamentally reorganising industry.

Last week Mr Yeltsin dismissed his entire government in a final attempt to rescue the second term of his presidency and its stalled reform programme from economic stagnation, bankrupt finances and widespread corruption.

Surprising political opponents, Mr Yeltsin brought in a 37-year-old provincial governor, Boris Nemtsov, to rejuvenate his government's reformist credentials.

Mr Nemtsov, who is untainted by past privatisation scandals, joined Anatoly Chubais as joint first deputy prime minister. Mr Chubais will have control of the finance ministry.

Mr Nemtsov, who made a name for himself as a liberal governor of Nizhny Novgorod, was given responsibility for ending the monopolies of the energy, gas, railway and communications sectors. He will also oversee the phased removal of the housing subsidy, and ensure wages and pensions are paid.

His reaction was: "This is a suicidal appointment." He looked worried as Mr Yeltsin told him in front of the television cameras: "You have experience and authority, you're fresh, you're not from Moscow, not one from the worn-out deck." Mr Yeltsin added: "Two young men — you and Anatoly Chubais — create a fresh young team in the government, from scratch."

As expected, former colleagues of Mr Chubais — Yakov Urinson, Alfred Koch, and Valery Serov — were made ministers responsible respectively for economics, privatisation, and national regional policy.

The big banks are now likely to reap the benefits of a new share-out of the most profitable raw-material monopolies.

Only General Anatoly Kulikov, the interior minister Mr Chubais tried so hard to move, remained among the heavyweights. The reshuffle's chief victim was the prestige of the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin. The prime minister had not named his own cabinet and he was left rather awkwardly to announce the names of the new team.

Mr Nemtsov's appointment succeeded in pacifying the Democratic Opposition Party of Grigory Yavlinsky, whose economic institute was used by Mr Nemtsov to devise a reform plan for Nizhny Novgorod. On Monday Mr Yavlinsky was at pains not to criticise Mr Nemtsov.

Mr Nemtsov promised new openness in government: "I will not tell lies, I will not take bribes or steal. I will explain to people everything I do, even the most unpleasant things."

His appointment is a bold move by Mr Yeltsin. Five years ago the president named him as a future leader of Russia, and the two men, both keen tennis players, have maintained good relations. Strangely, Mr Yeltsin's patronage has not damaged Mr Nemtsov politically.

The former governor has combined his reformist principles with a pragmatic approach: in his region he left control of the substantial industrial military complex with the old Soviet nomenklatura. But he has also managed not to fall out with Mr Chubais, the crusading and aggressive privatiser.

Mr Yeltsin reserved harsh words for Nato and the United States, days before he was due to meet President Clinton at the Helsinki summit, which begins on Thursday. He accused Nato of trying to throw a cordon sanitaire around Russia.

"The US will make a rude and serious mistake if it implements the plan for Nato's eastward enlargement," he said.

Papua army in revolt over mercenaries

Christopher Zinn in Sydney

PAPUA New Guinea was plunged into crisis on Monday after its ill-equipped army and police force mutinied against the government's use of mercenaries supplied by a British firm.

The country's military commander, Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok, who led the revolt, demanded the sacking of the prime minister, Sir Julius Chan, but was himself then dismissed by Sir Julian.

"After a meeting long into Monday night, the Papua New Guinea cabinet has removed Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok from his position as commander of the defence force," the prime minister said.

"We are a democratically elected government and as the representatives of the people we will not be stood over by a member of the disciplinary forces, who is supposed to be acting on the expressed wishes of the people." He went on to reassure citizens that the government was in control.

Gen Singirok had earlier denied staging a military coup, but said he could not let the government spend millions of dollars on mercenaries while his troops went without food, pay and supplies.

He said about 8,000 defence force personnel and paramilitary police would refuse to work with the mercenaries — mainly South Africans — to crack down on secessionist rebels on Bougainville island.

PNG was formerly under Australian rule. The Australian prime minister, John Howard, endorsed the government's decision to sack Gen Singirok. "We utterly deplore the attempts of [the] former commander-in-chief of the Papua New Guinea defence force to defy the authority of the duly-elected government," Mr Howard said.

"In the circumstances, the action taken by the prime minister . . . to remove the head of the defence force was both understandable and justifiable."

Gen Singirok said he was committed to democracy in PNG, which has a population of 4 million and more than 700 languages, but issued a deadline. "If the PM and his deputy and minister for defence do not step down within 48 hours, then I will plead to Papua New Guineans to join hands to force them to resign," he said.

The crisis was triggered by Sir Julius's controversial decision to hire mercenaries to end the nine-year war with guerrillas on mineral-rich Bougainville.

Despite condemnation from Britain, Australia and the United States, Sir Julius signed the $24 million deal with British-based company Sandline International to supply "military trainers" — financed with the partial float of a mine.

Gen Singirok said the hiring of mercenaries was morally and ethically wrong when the money could have been used on the country's own security forces.

Mobile phone detector to ring changes

Jon Henley in Helsinki

TIRED of that incessant ringing in pub or restaurant? Fed up with pointless, high-volume conversations from five tables away? Try mobile phone guard, the new way to mute recent history's most intrusive invention.

"The response has been amazing," said Henry Duhs, a Swedish entrepreneur who has launched the world's first cheap and effective mobile phone detector. "There are clearly a lot of people out there who want cellphones out of their lives."

In a country where almost one in three people owns a mobile, Mr Duhs said, it was getting hard to go anywhere without hearing one. He came upon his idea after a particularly annoying evening at a Stockholm cinema.

"The performance was interrupted five times by mobile phones ringing," he said. "One man even had a 15-minute conversation. I couldn't believe it."

The size of a cigarette pack, the mobile phone guard works by scanning the air waves for the signals the phones emit at frequent intervals when they "check in" with the nearest base station. When one is detected, an alarm sounds.

"It's not 100 per cent foolproof, but to achieve that you would basically have to build an entire base station," Mr Duhs said. "This should detect every mobile in a room within about 20 minutes, and it costs little more than the average phone."

Mr Duhs is not alone in his concern at the spread of mobile fever in Scandinavia. People Against Mobile Phones has attracted several thousand members in Norway, and priests are asking worshippers to turn off their phones before services.

Most mobile phone guard buyers will be hi-tech institutions, since the phones can wreak havoc with sensitive electronic equipment, Mr Duhs said. But his first customer was Uppsala university, where an exam candidate was caught using his phone to cheat.



Four women who have not set foot on their Pacific island since US nuclear testing began in 1946 break the radioactive ground on Bikini atoll, Marshall Islands, to signal they want to go home. The Marshallese say they will begin a nuclear clean-up if Washington guarantees their safety PHOTO: OFI JOHNSON

Europeans move to save fish stocks

Paul Brown in Bergen

EUROPEAN Union commissioners and North Sea fisheries and environment ministers last week proposed the establishment of no-fishing zones and curbs on industrial catches to save stocks threatened by over-fishing.

A two-day conference in the Norwegian city of Bergen was hailed as a success by the EU's fisheries commissioner, Emma Bonino, and the environment commissioner, Ritt Bjerregaard. But a dispute over the jurisdiction of North Sea states, triggered by Ms Bonino, at first threatened to derail the talks, and the meeting's non-binding final declaration was criticised as inadequate by environmentalists.

Ministers also agreed to curtail, and if possible halt, the practice of discarding fish too small to market. Up to 50 per cent of cod and haddock are thrown back dead into the sea.

Among the proposals is the introduction of selective fishing gear to protect small fish and, at the other end of the scale, dolphins and porpoises, many of which are drowned after being caught in nets. Beam trawling, which involves scraping the bottom of the sea up to four times a year and is considered destructive, also faces restrictions.

The parlous state of cod and herring stocks brought the two sets of ministers from 13 countries together for the first time to try to thrash out a common policy.

Their declaration was a rebuff to the European Commission, which had maintained that the policing of fisheries policy was a matter for the EU, not North Sea states. However, a number of ministers including John Gummer, the UK Environment Secretary, condemned the EU's common fisheries policy as a failure.

There were no timetables in the declaration for the introduction of bans on discarded fish, or the introduction of restricted fishing areas, but both Mr Gummer and the German delegation pledged to carry the process forward when their turn at the EU presidency came.

The Danes, who have been much criticised for their industrial fishing, particularly off Scotland's east coast, acknowledged that they would be excluded from certain sensitive areas. Svend Auken, the Danish environment minister, said: "It is a restriction we will have to accept, because it is good for the whole North Sea."

John Palmer in Strasbourg adds: Fraud that exploits loopholes in VAT and customs duties in the single European market and cigarette smuggling could be costing the European Union and national governments more than $16 billion a year, according to a two-year investigation by the European Parliament.

Despite the occasional success of the authorities in spotting abuse of the European single market rules which exempt goods in transit to third countries from customs duties, excises and VAT, the fraudsters still have the upper hand. The European Parliament investigation reveals not only the huge loss of revenue to the EU and its member states, but also the ambiguous role of the tobacco multinationals.

French 'made Holocaust nerve gas'

Paul Webster in Paris

ONLY days before the Allies invaded Normandy, a French factory shipped 37 tonnes of Zyklon-B gas to Germany, according to a new study which links French wartime government policy to the murder of Jews on an industrial scale.

A French historian, Annie Lacroix-Riz, whom officials tried to gag, will reveal in a 60-page study published later this month that a joint German-French enterprise, working with the approval of Marshal Pétain's Vichy administration, regularly sent supplies of the deadly poison to Germany from 1941.

The first known Holocaust victims to be gassed at Auschwitz, in July 1942 under Hitler's notorious Night and Fog edict, were among the 75,000 French and refugee Jews deported by Vichy after round-ups by French police.

Capsules of Zyklon-B found at Auschwitz carried the trade mark Degesch, an associate company of the joint German-French Degussa, itself a subsidiary of Zyklon-B's German inventor IG Farben, and the French chemical giant Ugine.

Although Ms Lacroix-Riz has yet to establish that French-made exports, labelled for military use only, were used at Auschwitz to murder Jews, her research will add to recent evidence of France's direct or indirect complicity in the Holocaust.

President Jacques Chirac, breaking with the defence put up by the former Vichy official François Mitterrand, has described Pétain's government as a criminal regime, a view supported by Ms Lacroix-Riz in the magazine Révue de l'Histoire de la Shoah.

Ms Lacroix-Riz, a history professor in Toulouse, tried to publish an official version of her research in a finance ministry publication. It was vetoed by a panel of historians, who said the findings were provocative and could result in a ban on research into sensitive official documents.

This was seen as an attempt to cover up the high level of voluntary industrial collaboration with the Nazis by prominent French firms still in operation.

But Ms Lacroix-Riz gained access to the restricted "Majestic files". These comprise millions of pages of German high command archives, once stored at Nazi headquarters in the Hotel Majestic. Using the "Kolb archives" on chemical industry collaboration, she found that a Ugine factory at Villers-Saint-Sépulcre, near Beauvais, north of Paris, was making Zyklon-B — officially listed as a pesticide — under IG Farben licence from 1940. A joint enterprise was set up, whose share values tripled as demand for Zyklon-B rose and investment increased tenfold. "As far as French industry was concerned, it was a question of turning a military defeat into a good financial deal," she said.

Export production jumped from one tonne in 1940 to 37 tonnes for the single month of May 1944, when output was monitored by British intelligence. All the gas, made under the supervision of German scientists, was for Nazi use.

● French banks laundered more than 1 billion francs ($176 million) from the accounts and savings of Jews who died in Nazi concentration camps during the second world war, Le Monde reported last weekend. The newspaper said French banks had benefited from the contents of 57,000 accounts left dormant because their holders did not return after being deported from France.

Mexico official banked drugs cash in US

Christopher Reed in Los Angeles

ENDING an extraordinary civil action in which United States prosecutors virtually put the Mexican government on trial for narcotics corruption, a jury decided last weekend that most of the $9 million confiscated from the former co-ordinator of Mexico's drug programme had come from traffickers' bribes.

Mario Ruiz Massieu, Mexico's deputy attorney-general, was accused of sending an aide, Jorge Stergios, to the Commerce Bank in Houston, Texas, with suitcases full of small denomination notes. Over a period of 13 months more than $9 million was deposited.

But while US politicians have been using the two-week trial to castigate Mexico about its lax policing of smuggled drugs, US authorities were also revealed to have missed $7.9 million of tainted cash.

Officials of the US treasury and customs, and an Internal Revenue criminal investigator were told of the deposits, but nothing was done. US officials acted only when the Mexican embassy in Washington alerted US customs 15 months after Mr Ruiz opened the account.

Mr Ruiz was arrested in New Jersey on his way to Spain with $42,000 undeclared money. He has been under civil arrest ever since.

Last Saturday jurors in Houston rejected Mr Ruiz's explanation that the cash came from a family fortune and bonuses from the former Mexican president. They decided that the US government could confiscate all but $1.1 million as bribe money received from drug smugglers. Mr Ruiz, who faces an extradition hearing, will appeal.

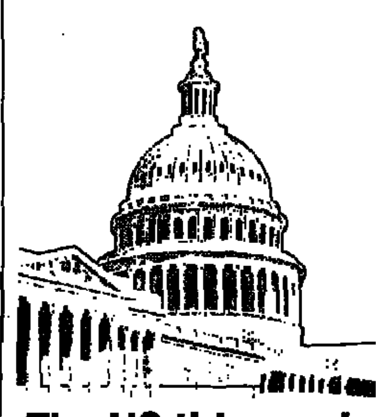
The Internal Revenue will hold an inquiry into its failure to spot what one of its investigators described as obvious "street money".

● Colombia's defence minister, Guillermo Alberto González, resigned last weekend, bowing to military pressure to step down after revealing that his congressional campaign had accepted money from a reputed drug kingpin, Justo Pastor Perafan, in 1989.

According to a senior military source, the armed forces commander, General Harold Bedoya, had said he and other top military officials would resign unless Mr González went.

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Clinton cleaves to Roosevelt's dream



The US this week

Martin Walker

IT MIGHT have been the most frustrating experience possible for a journalist, to be given nearly two hours of wide-ranging conversation with the president of the United States, on condition that it was all firmly off the record. But, by special dispensation, the Guardian has been given permission to quote a little of what Bill Clinton said, in remarks that for the first time indicate the vast scale of the president's foreign policy ambitions.

We were sitting and drinking tea in the private dining room at the end of the narrow corridor that runs from the Oval Office past the small study with the two portraits of Winston Churchill and the collection of 70 golf putters, when Clinton leaned forward and said he had been reading and re-reading the last speech of his great Democratic predecessor, Franklin Roosevelt.

"It was the speech Roosevelt was to give the day after he died, while the war was still raging in Europe. He said there was a real hope of the wartime allies — Russia, Britain, France and China — working together with the US and the new United Nations to build a better kind of world," Clinton said. "The cold war stopped all that, but we have a real and historic opportunity to work together in the way Roosevelt hoped. We can do that."

This statement of strategic nostalgia for a world that might have been came in the course of an intriguing conversation. We talked briefly of the political scandals, old and new, that beset but visibly did not depress him. But mainly we discussed foreign policy from China to Mexico, from the imminent summit with Boris Yeltsin in Helsinki to the dangers of European stagnation and Labour's prospects in the British election.

I had asked if there was something deliberate in all the references to the legendary cold war secretary of state Dean Acheson, and to the need to complete the original Europe-wide mission of the Marshall Aid plan, that we heard constantly in the speeches of Madeleine Albright. Did this administration see its European role in similarly historic terms?

"Yes, to the extent that we have an opportunity to fulfil the hopes interrupted by the cold war," Clinton replied, and then began citing phrases from that undelivered Roosevelt speech, which he dictated on April 11, 1945, just before his death.

Although little known, it is one of the classic statements of American optimism, just as Utopian a vision for the aftermath of the second world war as the rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson with his panaceas of national self-determination and Fourteen Points at the end of the first world war. The great difference, in Roosevelt's eyes, was that this time the US and its wartime allies would remain engaged and committed to bringing about this new world.

"The mere conquest of our enemies is not enough. We must go on to do all in our power to conquer the doubts and the fears, the ignorance and the greed, which made this horror possible," Roosevelt said.

"Today we are faced with the preeminent fact that, if civilisation is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships — the ability of all people, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace.

"The work, my friends, is peace. More than an end of this war, an end to the beginnings of all wars," Roosevelt went on, in a peroration that some historians have suggested might have helped avert the cold war altogether, if only Roosevelt had survived to deliver it and act upon its sentiments.

I suspect long chunks of that speech will be quoted to Yeltsin in Finland this week, as all the smooth-talking Arkansas charm is flooded over the stubborn Russian to win some sort of half-smile upon the great Clinton project to enlarge Nato.

But to put it like that is unfair to the grandeur of Clinton's concept. The crucial argument the White House is trying to make to the Kremlin is that Nato has already changed its fundamental character. It is no longer simply the defensive military alliance of the cold war. As a direct result of the Bosnian operation, Nato is now well advanced in its transition to wider pan-European and transatlantic security system.

This new, improved Nato is described by Clinton's staff in terms akin to television advertisements for the latest brand of soap powder. It spreads stability and widens democracy, which between them are the best guarantee of the economic prosperity to come. It imposes the principle of civilian rule over the military, and it leads countries such as Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic to resolve quickly all their outstanding disputes with their neighbours in order to clear the way for Nato membership.

In a previous meeting, Yeltsin had warned Clinton of the ingrained Russian fear of invasion from the West, that in each advance of Nato, every village and hamlet in Russia heard echoes from Napoleon's cannon and Hitler's panzers.

Clinton's new answer is that this enlarged and transformed Nato is itself the best guarantee of Russian security against future wars spilling out from the central European cauldron where all the last ones had brewed.

There is in today's White House a striking confidence, and even a conviction, that Russia has finally turned the corner. The economy is starting to grow again, and a period of spectacular growth is poised to take place over the next few decades. Comparisons with the long post-war boom of western Europe, or the recent growth of China, are freely made.



Operation Kneejerk . . . President Clinton leaves hospital in Florida in a wheelchair after sustaining a knee injury while a guest at golfer Greg Norman's home last week

There is also a quiet assurance that while Yeltsin will not give personal approval to the Nato plan in Helsinki this week, Russia is now reconciled to the inevitable. Yeltsin understands the West's need for an insurance policy, should Russia's tumultuous politics throw up a strident nationalist government. Clinton understands Russian alarm and nervousness, and also its need for tangible evidence that it will have a central place in the Atlantic alliance scheme of things.

Hence the offer of a permanent place among the heads of state at the annual economic summits of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations, even though Russia will not be invited to join the practical mechanism of the regular G7 finance ministers' meetings. Yeltsin in return has sent the right kind of signal, one that Clinton seems to have expected, with last week's appointment of Anatoly Chubais as first deputy prime minister with sweeping economic powers. As the man who ran Russia's massive privatisation scheme, Chubais has high credibility with the G7.

There is also a quiet assurance that while Yeltsin will not give personal approval to the Nato plan in Helsinki this week, Russia is now reconciled to the inevitable

The concessions have been coming thick and fast from both sides, equally determined to make the summit a success. The US and other Nato countries have now been told that Russia will not insist on the charter with Nato being "a legally binding document", formally ratified by national parliaments. They will now accept just "a binding document", on the lines of the 1975 Helsinki accords.

The new charter is designed to give Russia "a voice but not a veto" in the affairs of the enlarged Nato. It provides for a Russian liaison office at Nato HQ in Brussels, regular monthly meetings of officials and less frequent meetings of foreign and defence ministers, and joint operations in key fields such as peacekeeping, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and the environment. It calls for joint action on peacekeeping, although there is still bickering over whether this should only follow a UN security council mandate, as the Russians demand, or simply be in accord with the UN charter, which is what the US wants.

The diplomatic timetable is now becoming crowded, since Clinton wants to settle the Nato question before the G7 summit in Denver at the end of June. Officials are now discussing a further Russia-Nato summit, possibly in May, when Clinton comes to Europe for the 50th anniversary celebration of Marshall Aid. If all goes well, there could be Russian participation in the Nato summit in Madrid in July, at which the formal invitation to join will be extended. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic are widely expected to be in the first wave, while strong bids are also being made for Slovenia and Romania.

Much of the negotiating detail was completed in Moscow last week by the Nato secretary-general, Javier Solana. He held out to Primakov the prospect of sharing intelligence photographs, and inviting Russian observers to Nato exercises and air traffic control centres — a series of confidence-building measures to assure Russia that Nato's expansion up to its borders signalled no hostile intent.

Russia still opposes Nato enlargement in principle, but in practice is trying to negotiate the best available deal. Primakov came to Washington last week seeking some form of assurance that the three Baltic states, formerly Soviet territory, will not join Nato in a second wave of enlargement at least while Russia remains concerned about the treatment of ethnic Russian minorities in these countries.

The outstanding issue of Ukraine, which is also to be offered its own special charter with Nato rather than membership, still remains a potential hurdle. Unlike the Baltic states, forcibly merged into the Soviet Union during the second world war, Ukraine had been Russian territory since the early 18th century, and its status poses acute security problems for Russia.

All this means that there is a lot of detail about Nato, and even more about arms control, the scale of nuclear missile cuts and conventional military deployments still to be resolved at Helsinki. Jack Mendelsohn, a veteran US arms control negotiator, is so worried about the prospects for ratification of the Start II treaty (whose original negotiations began in Mikhail Gorbachev's day) that he says: "The US-Russian arms control agenda is in serious trouble." As well as nuclear missiles, there are major disputes about the deployment of theatre missile defence systems, sometimes called "Star Wars Lite", to which the US is firmly committed.

The problem is that fulfilling the terms of Start II, which cuts missiles to a ceiling of 3,000-3,500 on each side, will be expensive and burdensome for Russia, which needs to modernise its ageing arsenal. The logical answer is to leapfrog Start II and move swiftly to a Start III treaty, which would cut each side to around 2,000 modern, survivable and mainly mobile missiles. But that will be contingent on a Duma ratification of Start II. The good news is that the head of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces last week suggested that the Duma should do so in order to move on to Start III.

Still, all these arguments about missiles and anti-missile defence systems have some sceptics talking of a return to the mood of the old cold war summits. Yeltsin said he expected that the talks would be "the hardest in all the history of Russian-American relations". Since they only began when the Soviet Union collapsed, that may not be as dire as it sounds. Above all, that is not how the man now in the White House sees it, even though the nasty knee injury he sustained last week could have him lumbering into Helsinki on crutches. Clinton firmly believes that there is now a glittering opportunity to fulfil Roosevelt's world that might have been, and to see the cold war and its disputes as merely an interruption of history.

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Drought brings slow death in rural India

Suzanne Goldenberg in Themra

THE villagers descend on the meanest of the mud houses, pulling back the burlap curtain on the old woman cowering within: the next to die, they say.

Nearly blind, half-deaf, naked but for a tattered cloth that once was white, flesh and muscle melted from her bones, she does not have the strength to protest at being turned into a living exhibit of the misery that is visiting thousands of villages.

Surrounded by barren paddy fields and water tanks where bony cattle graze, Themra is at the centre of a region that is undergoing its driest season in 50 years. Last year's monsoon blew right past most of the coastal state of Orissa, but in the western hinterland, the failure of the rains has been especially devastating. In some places, the failure rate in the rice paddy, the main crop, is as high as 95 per cent.

The scale of the calamity was apparent by last September, when the state government appealed for about $160 million from New Delhi for disaster relief. By the beginning of this month, the national government had allocated only $10 million. Widesprend death and disease seem inevitable with the approach of the hot summer.

For the elderly and widows, such as Shobhabati Majhi, survival has become precarious. From a dark corner of a hut in which there are almost no possessions, her cousin brings out a cooking vessel: 500g of meal and 500g of rice in a thin porridge to feed a family of six.

Although the drought is regarded officially as a natural disaster, activists argue that the crisis is man-made: Earth's vengeance for deforestation that has reduced the soil's ability to hold water, and political indifference. "The government says the gods have failed . . . But that is just an excuse. This is not a drought area. The government created it," says Kapil Narayan Tiwari, a former member of the state assembly.

Government gazettes show that about 50 per cent of the land in west Orissa was irrigated through traditional methods at independence, but that proportion has slipped below 7 per cent — the lowest in the country. Farmers in western Orissa use less fertiliser than their counterparts elsewhere, making for some of the lowest crop yields in India.

Mr Tiwari accuses the state government of indifference fuelled by chauvinism against the tribals, or indigenous peoples, who are concentrated in the region. "We have sufficient rains, but the authorities are not doing anything to conserve water, so it just drains away," he says. "After independence, the government took over all the tanks and ponds, but it did no renovations or repairs, so they all went dry."

Although work started this year on a huge irrigation project, it may be too late. During the last bad dry spell a decade ago, when western Orissa became a byword for poverty, the country's conscience was stung by a newspaper story about a woman so desperate for survival that she sold her sister in marriage to an old, sickly farmer.

The current drought has attracted scarcely any attention, in part because in the emerging new India the issue of poverty has become deeply unfashionable.

Activists and some academics argue that India's rural heartland — where three-quarters of its people still live — has been overlooked since the introduction of market reforms six years ago. The broad enthusiasm of the anglicised urban élite for liberalisation, critics say, has shifted public debate away from the poor.

But that does not mean poverty has vanished. Last week, India's economic planners retreated from a wildly optimistic two-year-old estimate of the numbers of people living in absolute poverty. Instead, the planning commission says nearly 36 per cent of Indians — 320 million people — live below the official poverty line, unable to afford two meals a day.

Nowhere is the division between the two Indias as stark as in Orissa. While the coastal area has become a prime destination for foreign investors, there is virtually no industry in the west, where 80 per cent of the people live below the poverty line.

100 km
BIHAR
INDIA
WEST BENGAL
MADHYA PRADESH
Raipur
ORISSA
Balangir
Cuttack
Kharlar
Bay of Bengal

With drought becoming a cyclical occurrence, small farmers have no chance to recover from a meagre harvest. In Themra, as in most villages, several houses are padlocked as entire families have gone to other states in search of work. Those who stay remain at the mercy of local traders who drive down the prices they will pay for their harvest.

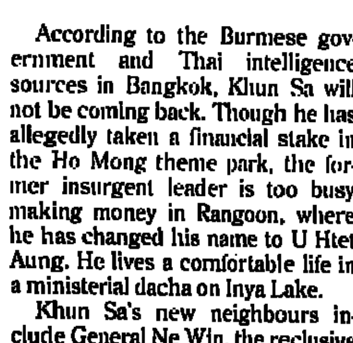
Burma's opium king is recast as businessman

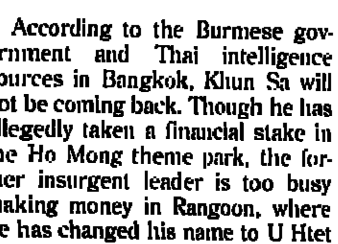
Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark in Rangoon

HO MONG was never on any map. The impenetrable mountain lair of Khun Sa and his 20,000-strong Mong Tai army, which controlled more than half the world's opium trade, was not a place the Burmese or Thais wished to advertise.

For 30 years it became an almost mythical kingdom in the clouds, which drug enforcement agencies worldwide unsuccessfully tried to breach. Hundreds of intelligence officers were deployed to catch Khun Sa and put a grid reference on his Burmese base. Today they can simply buy a ticket.

Since the "surrender" of the opium king in January 1996, things have begun to change in Ho Mong. The soldiers have left and the jungle hideout in Shan state is being converted into a tourist theme park. Trucks take visitors from Chiang Rai province in Thailand into Burma; 30km of rough mountain track lead to Khun Sa's hidden valley. From a forest sparsely inhabited by poppy growers, it grew into a town of 20,000 people, with 4,000 houses, a hospital and a school.





Attractions at "Khun Sa World" include the Tiger Camp — a military training centre for Mong Tai children, orphans and soldiers — and the parade ground where the chain-smoking guerrilla leader inspected his troops under a flag bearing the insignia of Free Ho Mong, an assault rifle and a fountain pen. For a few dollars more, tourists can buy a beer at the Khun Sa Karaoke Bar and take a trip around the "drug rehabilitation centre", a 5-metre pit into which withdrawing addicts were thrown. Before leaving, the tour party is whisked round the home Khun Sa nicknamed the White House.

Back across the border in Ban Hin Taek or Broken Rock village, Khun Sa's first hideaway in Thailand, work has begun to create a living museum, including photographs of "his playboy years" in Mandalay and newspaper clippings collected by the outlaw.

According to the Burmese government and Thai intelligence sources in Bangkok, Khun Sa will not be coming back. Though he has allegedly taken a financial stake in the Ho Mong theme park, the former insurgent leader is too busy making money in Rangoon, where he has changed his name to U Htet Aung. He lives a comfortable life in a ministerial dacha on Inya Lake.

Khun Sa's new neighbours include General Ne Win, the reclusive figurehead of the State Law and Order Restoration Council, Slorc. From the veranda of his heavily guarded mansion, Khun Sa can look across to Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader who is under virtual house arrest in her home on the other side of the lake.

US intelligence sources in Rangoon say his rehabilitation is being modelled on that of Loh Hsing-han, the former opium warlord sentenced to death in 1976 but set free in 1980. Loh is now one of the wealthiest men in southeast Asia.

Much has been rumoured about the deal that persuaded Khun Sa to surrender to the Slorc. The men who mediated for him in the lead-up to his televised surrender, including his former accountant and two Mong Tai officers, say a $200 million contract was drawn up. In return for the payment, Khun Sa was given a written guarantee of immunity from prosecution in Burma and from extradition to the United States, where he has been indicted on narcotics charges.

"Khun Sa was given licences to operate transport companies, trade in real estate and run a $24 million mineral concession under his new name," said a former Mong Tai official. US drug enforcement officials believe he was permitted to maintain links with the heroin network, which this year harvested a near-record opium yield of 2,560 tonnes.

Khun Sa's aides say he was required to hand over the day-to-day running of his fiefdom to the Tatmadaw, Slorc's military wing. Now military commanders control the taxation of heroin production and have also established opium farms manned by forced labour. Judge Rajsoomer Lallah, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights, recently met refugees who told him they had been forced at gunpoint to grow opium poppies.



Khun Sa, entrepreneur and former leader of the Mong Tai army

In Rangoon, Khun Sa has begun building a hotel complex on top of a cemetery. According to Thai intelligence, after his move to Rangoon, Khun Sa transferred massive funds from Thailand to state banks in Burma. He is not the only heroin millionaire to have been persuaded by the Slorc to move large amounts of black money into its ailing economy.

Four ethnic drug trafficking armies have recently opened offices and private banks in Rangoon. Slorc's own economic reports reveal that over the past two years the junta has borrowed more than $500 million from these institutions. A narcotics control report to be issued this month by the US embassy in Rangoon says the Slorc has created an economy underpinned by the proceeds of drug trafficking.

"There is reason to believe that the laundering of drug profits is having a substantial impact on the Burmese economy," it concludes. — *The Observer*

Robonurse helps aged

Jonathan Watts in Tokyo

TOSHIBA, the Japanese electronics group, has unveiled a robot in Tokyo that can recognise a face, respond to verbal instructions and shake your hand. Toshiba says it can also nurse the sick and elderly.

The "human-friendly" robot is perhaps the most sophisticated example of how Japan is using new technology to meet the challenge of caring for a rapidly ageing population.

"With fewer and fewer young people and more and more elderly, the manpower situation is such that we have to utilise high technology, not only for sophisticated medical treatment, but for routine care," said a spokesperson for the government's research and development programme for welfare and medical apparatus.

One of the programme's projects is a six-year plan for a robot to carry and clear food trays in hospitals and old people's homes. Equipped with a navigation unit to direct it from bed to bed, a monitor to inform patients of what is on the menu, and a mechanical arm to lift and remove trays, the designers hope the robot will allow nurses to concentrate more on care.

Meanwhile researchers at the Tochigi Prefecture Technology Centre have been working for two years on a system for keeping track of confused elderly people using satellites. The system — using the same technology found in car navigation devices — reduces the risk of people with senile dementia getting lost by giving them a pocket-sized transmitter that allows carers to trace their whereabouts. The centre will recommend the devices be subsidised and sold for about $400.

At present, about 15 per cent of Japan's population is aged over 65. But with a fertility rate of less than 1.5 children per couple (among the lowest in the world) and life expectancy of almost 80 years (the highest), Japan is greying much faster than any other country.

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Churches slam main parties

Patrick Wintour

BRITAIN'S CHURCHES have joined forces to launch a bitter assault on the main political parties, which they accuse of turning their backs on the dispossessed and unemployed in a frantic scramble for middle-class votes.

Using savage language to attack "the evil of complacency" about growing inequality, the Churches have produced an historic, 220-page report. It reveals their determination to put themselves at the heart of a movement to combat the emergence of a permanent underclass.

The report is intended as their most hard-edged intervention in politics since Faith In The City a decade ago. The bulk of the analysis will be seen as an attack on 18 years of Conservative rule, but the Churches also accuse Labour of failing to build a coalition of opinion willing to support tax rises to create jobs.

In the report, to be published on April 8, politicians are accused of largely offering only "cheap, or cost-free, palliatives for the unemployed". The Churches put forward their own package of benefit reforms, training for the long-term unemployed and cuts in employer National Insurance to boost private-sector jobs.

The report, the biggest joint enterprise ever undertaken by British Christians, claims: "None of the political parties are putting forward a programme which offers much real hope of improvement to those in greatest need.

"In the general election campaign, the political parties are competing for votes by promising lower taxation. When so many are living in poverty and unemployment, it is wrong to give priority to the claims of those who are already well off."

Wages as low as £2 an hour are common in many areas, while the average wages of people leaving unemployment to take a job are £4 an hour.

The report follows an 18-month inquiry by the 12 main Christian denominations, and its sponsors include the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and Cardinal Basil Hume.

In terms that contradict John Major's claim to be building a society of "haves, rather than have-nots", the authors say they have been shocked and saddened by the sharpness of contrast "between a favoured majority on the one hand, and those on the other who are left out. Wherever we went we saw increasing riches and increasing poverty side by side. Such contrasts should not be tolerated. They imply a complacency amongst the contented that has to be challenged."

The inquiry will infuriate ministers since it claims the Government's unemployment statistics are unreliable. The Government had been preparing to hail this week the 12th successive monthly drop in unemployment, down from last month's figure of 1.85 million. But the Churches' report asserts: "So many changes have been made to the criteria for benefit in recent years that the claimant count cannot be taken as a satisfactory indication of the pressure of demand for labour, or the social problems which arise from the shortage of jobs.

"It is increasingly coming to be recognised that in the UK the unemployment figures refer to just one category of those without paid work" — excluding the disabled, single parents, the sick and the involuntarily retired.

The report accepts the existence of benefit fraud but argues that the Government's benefit system traps a significant group of parents in poverty, as it is difficult for them to find jobs that do not involve a cut in income. — *The Observer*

Defiant Hogg hangs on

Ewen MacAskill

THE embattled Minister of Agriculture, Douglas Hogg, survived calls for his resignation in the Commons last week, in spite of a fresh batch of leaked letters detailing serious food safety offences.

Mr Hogg, forced to the Commons to make his second statement in a week because of growing public worry about the state of abattoirs following the BSE and *E.coli* outbreaks, announced a quickly cobbled-together "action plan" to drive up standards.

The letters, sent directly to Mr Hogg from Northumberland county council but to which he had not replied, complained of a shortage of trading standards officers to enforce BSE regulations. As a result, meat labelled as lamb and other BSE-free products in the north of England had, in fact, contained beef.

Amid opposition cries of "resign" and "burn the Hogg", he dismissed as misleading reports of declining standards at Britain's much-criticised abattoirs. "I do not pretend that there is not scope for further improvement," he said, adding that the Government "had been and remain determined to drive up standards, and we are succeeding".

The Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, said: "Were it not for the shadow of the general election, Mr Hogg would be on his way."

The Government earlier promised to publish a hygiene league table of slaughterhouses as a minister revealed that 45 meat inspectors were disciplined and three sacked for failing to uphold standards.

The Ministry of Agriculture revealed that the Meat Hygiene Service, the government agency set up two years ago to raise standards in abattoirs, had disciplined 45 of its 1,000 meat hygiene employees in the past two years. Four had been sacked, though one was later reinstated on appeal. Most of the complaints related to BSE, in particular not making sure that spinal material and other potential carriers were removed.

Britain's biggest supermarket chain discovered chronic safety lapses at an abattoir which had been approved by meat inspectors, *write John Arlidge and Michael Durham.*

Meat Hygiene Service officials missed a catalogue of serious problems at Perth Fresh Meats in Scotland. Instead, they were uncovered by inspectors sent in by Tesco after a tip-off. The supermarket group immediately terminated its contract with the company, then one of its biggest suppliers. The abattoir has since gone out of business.

A former employee told Tesco that animals arrived at the plant caked in faeces, slaughter halls were contaminated, meat returned by supermarkets was relabelled as fresh and sent back out for sale, and that the plant was not cleaned properly.

Inspectors found minced meat past its sell-by date was being mixed with fresh meat and sent to shops, and old cuts were being relabelled. Meat processing machinery was not being kept clean, and some hygiene log books had been forged.

Howard to reform rape trials

Luke Harding

ALLEGED rapists defending themselves in court will lose the right to cross-examine the people who have accused them, the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, announced last week.

The move is designed to eliminate the harrowing ordeal which rape victims can suffer when their attackers question them — often intimately — in open court.

The proposal follows the case of Julia Mason, who was questioned over six days at the Old Bailey last summer by the man who raped her twice. Her ordeal sparked a public outcry.

Ralston Edwards, who was found guilty on two counts of rape, attended court in the same jumper and jeans he had worn when he raped Mrs Mason. In a low, flat voice devoid of emotion, he asked her to give a precise account of the sexual humiliation she had suffered at his hands. At one stage she fled the courtroom.

Mrs Mason, aged 34, complained to the European Commission of Human Rights about her treatment. "It was as if I had been raped once by Edwards, and again by the British judicial system."

Under the proposed changes, judges would be given discretion to stop defendants who are representing themselves in court from personally cross-examining people who have accused them of rape and other offences. Instead, cross-examination could be conducted only by a representative.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Minister's 'evil IRA scum' tirade provokes protests

ALTHOUGH she is seven months pregnant and has a suspected deep vein thrombosis, Roisin McAliskey was last week refused bail by a High Court judge who upheld claims by Crown lawyers that she might abscond. The Prison Service ruled, however, that she would be allowed to keep her baby in Holloway prison, where she has been on remand since November. And she would not be chained while giving birth in an outside hospital.

Ms McAliskey is facing extradition to Germany, where she is wanted for questioning over the bombing of Osnabrück army barracks. Although not convicted of any offence, she seems to suffer guilt by association because her mother, Bernadette (née Devlin), a former nationalist MP, was a firebrand republican activist in the early days of the Northern Ireland troubles.

David Maclean, the loose-lipped junior Home Office minister in charge of criminal policy, seemed to have made up his mind about her guilt. In replying to a constituent, who had complained to him about Ms McAliskey's prison treatment, Mr Maclean loosed off a tirade about "IRA scum" and said he had as much sympathy for her as he would have for the Moors murderer, Myra Hindley.

There were protests — in London, Ireland and the United States — that this could be highly prejudicial to any future trial of a woman who has never been convicted of IRA membership, let alone anything else. But Mr Maclean, who recently said most of London's beggars were "aggressive Scots", refused to apologise.

Moreover he was backed by the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who said Mr Maclean "has my support and, I have no doubt, the support of the vast majority of the public".

THE FIRST anniversary of the Dunblane massacre, in which 16 children and their teacher were killed by a deranged gunman, was marked quietly and with dignity in the small Scottish cathedral town.

The bereaved parents had asked to be left in peace and requested that there should be no special church or memorial service because, according to the children's headmaster Ron Taylor, "we remember them every day". But people were invited to place lighted candles in their windows, in Dunblane and throughout Britain.

TAKING GOODS from superstores without paying for them is not stealing, according to the Rev John Papworth, a retired 75-year-old Anglican priest. "It is a reallocation of resources, which is badly needed," he said.

Mr Papworth was complaining, not unreasonably, about the way superstores — "places of evil and temptation" — destroy communities and force small businesses into bankruptcy. Brought up in an orphanage, he confessed to having shoplifted when young and said he would do so now "but, like most clergymen, I don't have the courage of my convictions".

Told that he would be reported to the Bishop of London, Mr Papworth was unrepentant and accused the Church leadership of being "intellectually comatose and spiritually moribund".

He has not always lacked the courage of his convictions. He was jailed in the 1960s with Bertrand Russell for his part in the Committee of 100 anti-nuclear marches, and again in the United States after taking part in a march for black rights. And he has admitted sheltering the notorious double agent, George Blake, after his escape from prison in 1966.

AN HISTORIC chapter in book publishing was finally closed when the Restrictive Practices Court ordered the scrapping of the Net Book Agreement on the grounds that it was against the public interest.

The agreement, allowing publishers to fix the retail prices of books, had been operated for 96 years. It was sustained in the belief that it enabled publishers to use the profits of bestsellers to subsidise the production of "serious" work at little or no profit.

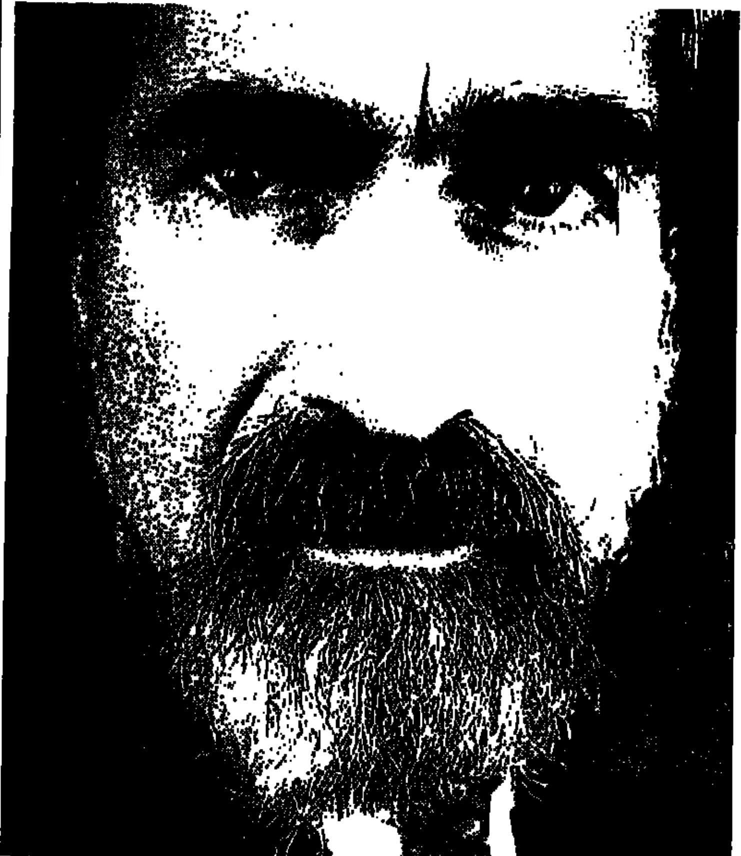
It had been ignored since September 1995, when large publishers withdrew their support and bookstore chains and supermarkets started to discount titles. But supporters, such as the playwright Tom Stoppard, claim that since the suspension of the agreement the nation's literacy has been threatened by a "bestseller culture".

THE Speaker of the Commons, Betty Boothroyd, ruled that it was "unacceptable" for MPs to be prompted by people outside the chamber who might be watching the proceedings of the House on television.

Last week she spotted a Labour MP, Brian Wilson, reading a message on his electronic pager as he challenged a Tory MP about his outside interests. He was obviously being fed with factual ammunition, possibly by researchers back in party headquarters.

Miss Boothroyd said she could have no objection to "instruments which merely vibrate to attract the attention of the bearer, provided they are silent". Her objection was to their use an an aide-memoire. Mr Wilson interpreted this to mean that MPs could receive information, but not use it. "I'm not sure how enforceable that is."





Chief Rabbi Sacks: his letter was leaked PHOTOGRAPH: STEVE PYKE

Sacks reopens rift

Alex Bellos

BRITAIN'S Jewish community was this week facing its deepest split for more than 100 years after a newspaper published a leaked letter by the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks.

Long-running tensions between the Orthodox and Reform communities exploded into the open with the letter, in which the Chief Rabbi describes Reform as a "false grouping" of Jews "who destroy the faith".

The Chief Rabbi, who did not apologise for the remarks, faced demands by the non-Orthodox to redefine his title so that it was clear he spoke only for a section of Anglo-Jewry. Although officially he represents only Orthodox Jewry, he is widely seen as a figurehead for all.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain, the spokesman for the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, called on the Chief Rabbi to renounce his title and adopt the more limited one of Leader of Orthodox Jews. "The Chief Rabbi no longer represents all Jews and speaks only for the Orthodox sector."

The argument originated with the Chief Rabbi's decision not to go to the funeral of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, the broadcaster and Reform Jew who died last year, but to attend a secular memorial service last month.

To defuse criticisms in the ultra-Orthodox wing, Dr Sachs wrote a letter in rabbinic Hebrew to Dayan Chanoch Padwa, the leader of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. The letter was leaked to the Jewish Chronicle, which decided to print because of an "overriding public interest".

In the letter the Chief Rabbi described Rabbi Gryn as "amongst those who destroy the faith". He said his appearance at the secular service would offer a good opportunity to say he did not recognise the concept of a Reform rabbi and "a victory would be won" against the Reform movement. If he did not go, he added, it could be used to show that there was a need for a Reform chief rabbi.

The Chief Rabbi described the leak as a "scandalous betrayal". He did not retract his words but called for "an end to the public bickering".

He issued a seven-point list of principles for mutual respect between Jews, calling on them to work together on matters affecting them all — such as fighting anti-Semitism, remembering the Holocaust and improving relations with other faiths.

Matthew Calman, the editor of London Jewish News, warned reformists that they were in danger of falling into a trap. "We have to ask who leaked this letter and why? Jonathan Sacks has made enormous strides towards reconciliation among the different movements in Anglo-Jewry over the last five years The people who leaked this letter are his rightwing critics who despise Reform."

Orangemen agree deal

David Sharrock

A PATH leading Northern Ireland away from last summer's unrest over loyalist parades was established this week when it was confirmed that Orangemen and Sinn Fein members have reached local agreement to allow a traditional July 12 march in the Co. Tyrone village of Dromore.

BBC Radio Northern Ireland revealed that agreement has been reached between clergy, the Orange Order and local councillors including Sinn Fein members.

It centres on the main Co. Tyrone demonstration. The agreement was reached on routes, times and the number of lodges and bands attending, the programme said.

An SDLP councillor, Liam McQuaid, said local people were happy with the outcome. "Last year on the morning of the 12th there was a mini-riot with regard to Orangemen parading in Church Street, which is a highly nationalist area.

"We didn't want to see that happen again. As far as the people of Church Street are concerned and particularly older people, they just don't want any hassle. Their attitude would be 'the parade only lasts 20 minutes, let them have it'."

The agreement augurs well for the rest of the marching season, which kicks off next month.

Dorrell faces legal fight over paedophile ring

LAWYERS demanding a public inquiry into abuse by staff at children's homes in northwest England claimed that a paedophile network as well organised as the Mafia could be at work in the UK.

Solicitors representing about 150 child abuse victims urged the Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, to announce a public inquiry within 14 days or face a legal challenge.

The lawyers have already issued writs against the organisations that ran the five main children's homes at the heart of a huge three-year police and social services investigation in Merseyside and Cheshire as they seek compensation for the victims.

They are planning to mount a judicial review in the High Court to force the Government to set up an inquiry into the child abuse scandal, which has seen 11 paedophiles who had senior jobs at the homes given long prison sentences.

Peter Garsden, the solicitor leading the group, said: "If they continue to prevaricate we have to consider taking proceedings against the Government in a judicial review. It is over to the Government to take action. It is the most serious child abuse inquiry yet."

He said all the clients represented by the lawyers backed the call for a public inquiry, and many of their MPs had written to the Government supporting the demand.

"The victims feel the system has let them down, and the system should say it is sorry by holding a public inquiry. No matter how many inquiries are held, new lessons can be learnt and a public inquiry may uncover links between abusers in different parts of the country."

He pointed out that Keith Laverack, aged 52, a former children's home headmaster and social services manager jailed for 18 years by Chester crown court last week for 15 child sex offences, began his activities in Warrington but ended up in Cambridge.

He agreed that homes were more strictly controlled now than when the abuse took place in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, but said it was important to study the methodology of the paedophile. "He is not a man in a dirty mac who looks like a child abuser. He looks like you and me."

He claimed that children's organisations such as the NSPCC and the Children's Society were anxious about the question of a paedophile network at work in Britain.

"They believe it is as well organised as the Mafia." He said nobody knew how much pressure there was within members of the paedophile fraternity not to give evidence against one other. "My belief is that it won't be long before someone in prison talks. Their conscience will get the better of them." — *PA*

Government puts its faith in charity

David Brindle

MOST charities providing social care under contracts with local authorities say they are having to subsidise the services from fund-raising income, a survey last week showed.

The findings came as the Government published a white paper proposing that all services for elderly and disabled people be privatised by handing them over to the voluntary and private sectors.

The white paper, which would be legislated upon if the Conservatives were re-elected on May 1, also sets out plans to require social services departments to share responsibility for children's services with other agencies; to improve the training of social workers involved in child care; and to introduce a new system for regulating social care.

The Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, described the proposals as "the biggest changes in the structure and delivery of social services since social services departments were created in 1971".

However, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has called for urgent talks with ministers. It said a survey of charities, due out in May, suggested the voluntary sector was unhappy. Of 115 charities providing care services, 69 per cent said they were having to dip into their own funds to top up what they were paid to run them, while 54 per cent said they were being expected to accept additional tasks.

Stuart Etherington, NCVO chief executive, warned: "If the Government is proposing a major change in the way social services are delivered, this should not be done on the assumption that the voluntary sector will subsidise such changes."

The white paper represents the third front of the Tories' welfare offensive, following last week's plans to replace the state pension and the bill to encourage people to buy insurance for long-term care.

The charity Age Concern said it remained unconvinced that local authority services were more expensive than the private sector — the ostensible reason for the privatisation plan — and the Association for Residential Care said it feared some authorities would interpret value-for-money as "the cheapest service they can find".

The 39-page blueprint says the direction for the next 25 years of social services departments should be commissioning social care, not providing it or regulating it.

The white paper asserts that "the very large majority" of people rightly provide social care for themselves, or have it provided by family, friends and neighbours. "The role of statutory social services is to act as support to those who are meeting social care needs in these ways, and as a commissioner of care to support those for whom these networks fail."

Spending on social services has risen four-fold in real terms since 1971/72, totalling more than £8.4 billion in 1996/97.

Although the white paper acknowledges that "much is done to high standards" by social services departments, it says there is inadequate transparency about how such large sums of money are spent.

It argues that departments are "not well-suited" to be direct providers of services. There is clear evidence that private and voluntary sector providers offer better value for money, it claims. "The Government therefore wishes to entrench the trend towards more external supply of residential and home care."

It is proposed to qualify local authorities' power to provide residential care for adults, stipulating they may do so only if they can still prove a need after a rigorous and objective review of independent-sector alternatives. The same arrangements would apply to care provided in elderly and disabled people's own homes, as well as to day centres. But the white paper accepts that the independent sector is "not yet so well developed" as in residential care.

Social Services — Achievement and Challenge; Stationery Office; £6.85

Rail firm may lose franchise

Keith Harper

SOUTH West Trains faces a £1 million fine and is two moves away from having its franchise removed unless it improves its services, the rail industry regulator announced last week.

John O'Brien, director of the office of passenger rail franchising, Opraf, said that unless SWT runs at least 98.5 per cent of its services in April an enforcement order will be issued.

Mr O'Brien also ordered the company to spend £1 million on improvements, because it had failed to deliver on promises it made a year ago when it became the first private rail passenger operator.

SWT has been unable to run a full service of 1,500 trains a day since it made 70 drivers redundant in January, in a move the Government described as "inept".

Mr O'Brien said: "Passengers have suffered an unacceptable level of cancellations in recent weeks. My priority is to see services restored to normal."

The possibility of SWT losing its franchise would occur if the company was fined and yet still failed to run 97.5 per cent of services. The current transgression is the company's third in less than a year.

The Transport Secretary, Sir George Young, said the move showed the Government's determination to hold train operators to their contracts, and take firm steps when they failed to come up to scratch. But Keith Bill, national secretary of Save Our Railways, said that Stagecoach, which owns SWT, had "dismally failed" to show what it could do and that the fine would have the same effect as "a peashooter on an elephant".

In Brief

A HIGH Court judge agreed to send a test case to the European Court of Justice for a ruling on whether Britain is breaching European equality laws by banning gays from the services. Labour has signalled its intention to lift the ban, subject to consultation with service chiefs on how best to achieve that goal.

SION JENKINS, the foster father of 13-year-old Billie-Jo Jenkins, has been charged with her murder.

ALAN HOWARTH, the former Thatcherite minister who defected to Labour, has delighted Tony Blair by landing the safe seat of Newport East.

DOCTORS should be subjected to HIV tests whenever they move hospital, a charity urged after an obstetrician, Patrick Ngosa, was struck off the medical register for lying about his HIV status.

A COMPLAINT against leading shadow cabinet figures for using a blind trust funded by anonymous millionaires to raise cash to run their offices was dismissed by Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Comment, page 14

THREE members of the neo-Nazi group Combat 18 have been jailed for possessing "threatening, abusive or insulting" material which was intended to stir up racial hatred.

PETER SUTCLIFFE, the Yorkshire Ripper, has permanently lost his sight in one eye after being attacked by a fellow patient at Broadmoor.

THE Picasso painting stolen from a central London gallery has been recovered.

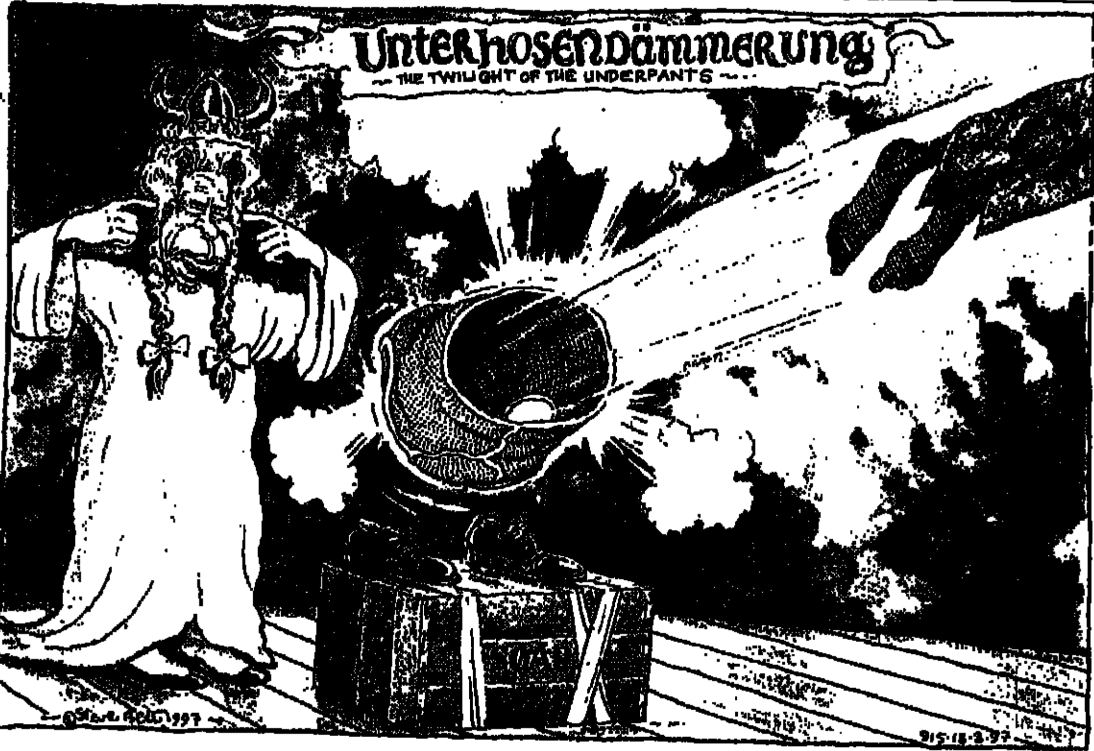
THE SCOTTISH National Liberation Army's founder and leader, Adam Busby, was jailed for two years in Dublin's Special Criminal Court.

A ROME magistrate gave the footballer Paul Gascoigne a three-month suspended prison sentence for assaulting an Italian photographer in 1994.

JOHN KINSELLA, convicted in 1994 of the IRA bombing of the Warrington gasworks, has had his case referred to the Court of Appeal.

A FEMALE firefighter routinely branded a tart and subjected to relentless sexual discrimination by colleagues was awarded £220,000 damages.

ACTOR Ronald Fraser has died aged 66. His credits included Pennies From Heaven and Brideshead Revisited.



Six weeks of trainspotting heaven

SKETCH
Simon Hoggart

AT LEAST someone is looking forward to the next six weeks. "Elections, some people say, are tough and gruelling businesses. Well, up to a point that's true," admitted John Major. "But I think they're also a lot of fun!"

It was like those teachers who tried to tell you that learning Greek was jolly exciting. Vicious, dreary, repetitive, mendacious, interminable — all those words spring to mind. But fun? John Major is not like the rest of us. He is a trainspotter with a six-week platform pass at Crewe.

At the end of Downing Street tourists pushed against the gates. They were like the ghouls who stare at car crashes. But they could enjoy a few final Majorisms. He had asked the Queen for a dissolution, "and I'm delighted to say she has consented" — as if there was the remotest chance she would have told him to get lost.

Then, breathtakingly: "Like some of you I have waited a long time for this general election — and I am delighted that we have now got it," he said with a straight face, as if it was like the coming of spring or an England cricket victory.

The Prime Minister's strategy seems to be to cash in on the nation's gratitude at the longest election campaign for 80 years. We'll be having so much fun, we just won't want it to end!

"Lady Thatcher Doorstep" said the announcement. It was to be one of those spontaneous doorstep chats which she made her own: remember "Rejoice!"; "We are a grandmother"; "I fight on, I fight to win."

The press clustered in Belgravia at Global HQ of the World Institute of Thatcherology. We were pilgrims at her shrine. The manifestation had a particular piquancy, since she has been quoted lately as approving of Mr Blair. "He won't let Britain down," she told the Times.

She was late. Was she tossing a coin to decide whom she would endorse? Finally the Great Architect of Thatcherology appeared. Would Mr Blair let Britain down, some troublemaker shouted.

"I hope we don't get Prime Minister Blair. I'm hoping we will get to keep Prime Minister Major. Mr Blair is *different* from Prime Minister Blair."

This bordered on the runic. In what sense? Jekyll and Hyde? Or was it a coded reference to Prime Minister Major who had been such a cruel let-down after Mr Major? We sought elucidation. "Is Tony Blair a good chap?" we cried at her back. "I hope you think Thatcher's a good woman, otherwise you wouldn't have come in such large numbers," she threw over her shoulder.

And so the Eric Cantona of British politics retreated into her temple.

Sellafield waste dump refused

Paul Brown

THE £2 billion plan to dispose of nuclear waste in an underground dump at Sellafield in Cumbria was refused planning permission this week by the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, throwing the nuclear industry into turmoil.

It was dismissed on scientific and technical grounds as well as being regarded an unacceptable for the Lake District national park.

Environmental groups, which had objected to the plan, were cock-a-hoop at what they regarded as a great victory for them and a disaster for the nuclear industry because it will force the building of massive surface concrete stores for the material. The setback means that it will be impossible to find anywhere to dispose of nuclear waste for at least 30 years.

Stunned officials at Nirex, the nuclear company which has spent £200 million developing the deep disposal scheme over 10 years, said there were no plans about what to do next.

Mr Gummer's decision ended weeks of speculation following a leaked memo from Nirex's director of science, Dr John Holmes, in which he admitted to fellow scientists on the project that "we may struggle to make a case".

Friends of the Earth, which had spent considerable funds attacking Nirex at the planning inquiry in Cumbria, said it was the first time in its history that the nuclear industry had lost a planning appeal. "This application was wrong on scientific, amenity and economic grounds, and we proved it at the inquiry."

The story of the nuclear industry's failure to deal with its waste problem has been tied to a series of decisions taken on the eve of general elections. The last plan to dispose of waste in shallow clay deposits was abandoned just before the 1987 election when the four possible sites were all in Tory-held seats.

Rise in violent crime thwarts Howard's boast

Alan Travis

A SHARP rise in violent crime marred Michael Howard's attempts last week to burnish his law and order credentials despite a slight fall in the annual recorded crime figures for the fourth year running.

The 1996 figures showed a 1.3 per cent fall in recorded crime in England and Wales, or a reduction of 67,000 to 5,033,000 reported offences over the previous year.

Violent crime rose by 11 per cent to 344,300 offences, which was the largest increase recorded since 1989. It includes a 14 per cent rise in rapes and a 17 per cent increase in more serious violent offences.

Mr Howard, the Home Secretary, said the 10 per cent fall in the official crime rate since 1992 showed the Government had "overcome the defeatist attitude that nothing can be done about rising crime". There were now half a million fewer offences than reported to the police in 1992.

The shadow home secretary, Jack Straw, said the "modest reduction" in the past few years had to be judged against "the mountainous doubling of crime and disorder since the Conservatives came to office in 1979".

The Home Office said the rise in violent crime and fall in property offences confirmed 1990 research which showed that acquisitive crime tended to fall and personal crime was likely to rise during an economic recovery.

The figures show that the overall 1.3 per cent fall was fuelled by a 75,000 or 6 per cent drop in burglaries and a 28,800 or 2 per cent fall in car crime. Overall property offences fell from 4.7 million in 1995 to 4.6 million in 1996. The 10-year burglary trend, however, shows an average rise of 2 per cent a year.

The 11 per cent or 33,400 rise in violent crime includes a 17 per cent increase in "life-threatening offences" including wounding and conspiracy to murder, although the murder total fell from 745 to 683.

But Paul Cavadino, chairman of the Penal Affairs Consortium, warned that part of the fall in crime was illusory because fewer victims were reporting crimes.

Locals take fright at berth of monster in Portland harbour

Kamal Ahmed

IT CAME, it stopped. It went forwards, it went backwards. It turned around. It went forwards again.

In a laborious and sometimes farcical operation, Britain's first prison ship since the reign of Queen Victoria arrived at its new home in Portland, Dorset, last week to resignation and anger from the local population.

"It's monstrous," said Pam Warley, one of a small knot of Portlanders who came to see just how ugly the 130-metre vessel is.

They were not disappointed. Five floors of grey steel, the prison block itself, are topped by a quadrant with four-metre-high fences crowned by wire — the exercise yard.

The only splash of colour was a man in orange overalls gesticulating to the tug captains as they pushed and pulled the ship in a ponderous sea-going ballet.

But there were fresh question marks over the project after the local council published a report criticising the Government's decision to site the ship in Portland harbour, already scarred by disused naval installations and a rusting oil rig.

Some locals admitted that the ship might bring employment to the area, which was hit by closure of the naval base in 1995. But most believed the impact of the prison ship would be negative. "It won't bring any new jobs for local people," said Robin Pearson, owner of the Tea Cosy cafe in the village of Fortuneswell. "We already have far too many prison officers working on the island, and most of them come from miles away."

Portland employs numerous prison officers, who govern the 500 inmates of Verne prison and the 600 inmates of the Portland young offenders institution, the largest in Europe.

"We want Portland to be thought of as a holiday resort," said Brian Ellis, the mayor. "We don't want to be known as the prison capital of the world."

Anarchy rules in Albania

ALBANIA'S PLUNGE into chaos has become Europe's second great tragedy since the end of the cold war. And, unlike Bosnia, it has not been unexpected. The risk is not just to life and safety for its people, but to its neighbours in the southern Balkans. This time there is no excuse for shoulder-shrugging on the grounds that this is merely "Balkan behaviour". We know that neglect now only stores up worse trouble for the future. Yet how the European powers should intervene effectively, having acquiesced so long and so complacently in the misrule of President Sali Berisha, presents an even greater dilemma than the case of Bosnia. That crisis at least involved some degree of aggression across national frontiers: this is wholly internal. Yet that does not diminish the need to tackle the problem as inventively as possible — and as urgently.

Last week Albania's already grim reality became overlaid by stock images of crisis. Chinooks with whirring blades, evacuees crouching low, unidentified hostile fire, euphoria when safety was reached . . . this is the spurious stuff of Saigon '75. While the evacuation of foreign nationals is important, it is peripheral to the real issues and should not become a substitute for them. The other set of stock images concerns the nature of the "anarchy" spreading across Albania. The label is correct: the gun law (especially in the south) and the looting need no exaggeration — it is as terrifying as it sounds. The spread of uncontrolled violence to the capital Tirana stepped across a new boundary of lawlessness. But it may not be entirely random. There were mounting claims that at least some of the arming of civilians in Tirana had been organised by Mr Berisha and his loyalists. And his secret police appear to have staged some operations to destabilise and divide the opposition. Nor, even if anarchy does rule completely, should this become an excuse for turning European backs on the crisis. Western diplomats last weekend were said to be claiming that "this is eastern Zaire, not Europe", and muttering about "the folly of getting involved in a chaotic Balkan country". It would be greater folly to stay uninvolved.

Mr Berisha has continued to be regarded with excessive indulgence until long past his personal point of no return. As late as the middle of last week, the US state department was romancing about "the positive political steps taken by President Berisha in the last few days". His new "coalition" government came far too late, after days of stubborn negotiations, while the south fell apart; his ruling party still insisted on controlling the interior ministry. The promise of parliamentary elections by June under Mr Berisha now appears complete fantasy. Last week, the EU said it was working with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to hammer out a co-ordinated and urgent response to the crisis. Europe does still have considerable economic leverage and must be ready to reward with maximum speed and emphasis a return to peaceful conduct. What is needed urgently is Mr Berisha's immediate resignation, a new acting administration, and the promise of immediate elections.

Tory miracle of full coffers

EVEN decent and honourable Conservatives may find it difficult to take advice from the former party treasurer Lord McAlpine. He is one of those troublesome irreconcilables who seem to find it intellectually and emotionally impossible to come to terms with the sinking of Baroness Thatcher. Now he has enlisted with Sir James Goldsmith's Referendum Party. For all his chubby, cheerful appearance this, Conservatives no doubt tell themselves, is a disappointed, even embittered, man whose pronouncements need to be judged in that light.

Even so, decent and honourable Conservatives ought to take serious account of what Lord McAlpine has been saying about the party's finances, and especially the improvement recorded since the last election, from near-destitution to coffers so full that record sums may be spent on the coming election. Here, it seems, is a recovery in the Ernest Saunders class, with a boost, on his lordship's figures, of some £60 million over five years. No one outside a charmed and secretive circle seems to know why. The Conservatives always tell us how dependent they are on a mass of donations from people of no great wealth, but that argument, never compelling, certainly won't wash here. Corporate donors, too, have been nowhere near so generous as they were. "If the party has got 40-odd million quid in the kitty," Lord McAlpine says "and the people generally believed to be giving it have stopped doing so, then where has the money come from?"

On the face of it, this question has much in common with the now better ventilated issues of parliamentary sleaze — cash for questions, MPs enjoying lucrative but still shadowy relations with companies, and the rest. When British politicians speak, whether they are backbenchers asking questions about insurance or leaders seeking our votes, we need to know if it's politics speaking, or money. Who, when big sums change hands, is left beholden to whom? The only sure defence against malpractice is complete transparency.

On that basis, it is right that questions should also be asked about the funding of senior Labour figures, though Sir Gordon Downey last week rejected with something close to contempt the complaints of Conservative backbench bovver boy David Shaw (Dover). Labour, in any case, comes out of it cleaner, because, unlike most Tories, it concedes that a problem exists. Labour sees a strong case for a ban on foreign funding, which the Conservatives — even after Nadir, Latsis (who coughed up £500,000, according to Lord McAlpine) and Botnar — still decline to accept. Labour would ask the Nolan committee, or some comparable group, to investigate the whole issue and furnish ground rules. It's perhaps the most disreputable aspect of the Government's record that it would not allow Lord Nolan's committee to look at party funding. The Prime Minister's stock rejoinder — that a House of Commons select committee has already investigated the funding of parties — merely compounds his offence. As he very well knows, the committee divided on party lines: its report represented the views of Conservative members only, hardly the most dispassionate group to judge an issue like this.

Polls suggest the taint of sleaze that hangs around the Conservative party has helped feed its unpopularity. John Major would do something to redeem himself and his party if he promised that, if re-elected, he would set up an open inquiry. Better still, he could reveal just how and where his party has found its new wealth.

Burying the Bard in concrete

IF THERE were a national award for cultural barbarism it should go to those who have squandered the opportunity of the century: the chance to open up the remains of two Elizabethan theatres intimately associated with Shakespeare. The remarkably preserved foundations of the Rose — on which Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson trod the boards — was uncovered in 1989 during excavations before the construction of an office block by Southwark bridge. Instead of developing it into a living monument for lovers of Shakespeare, the authorities allowed a 10-storey edifice to be built — though thanks to a last-minute campaign the remains were saved (though not before eight piles were driven into them). Now it lies like an unvisited graveyard, checked for humidity once a month but closed to the public.

This year the authorities have the chance to make amends: by excavating the remains of the original Globe theatre, a stone's throw from the Rose, where Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth were first played. Will they rise to the occasion? Of course not. The building on top of the Globe will be converted into a four-storey block of flats with underground car park and the rest of the site sealed as a permanent burial. They won't listen to the request of the Globe Trust (builders of the replica Globe theatre and museum) to allow keyhole surgery excavations to learn more about the shape of the original. Meanwhile in Greenwich, hundreds of millions of lottery pounds are to be spent on a temporary millennium exhibition, a part of which could have transformed this area into a breathtaking memorial that would pay for itself with tourist earnings. Instead, it will be preserved as a mausoleum to philistinism of which even this dying government should feel thoroughly ashamed.

If the world won't help, we must fight alone

Wole Soyinka

WHEN I wrote in my latest book, The Open Sore Of The Continent, that "the judicial murder of the Ogoni nine and the continued decimation of Ogoni people was the first Nigerian experimentation with ethnic cleansing, authorised and sustained by the Nigerian despot General Sani Abacha", some critics in foreign ministries described this as the language of an activist given to dramatising his opponents' action.

Prior to this grotesque display of savagery by General Abacha, he had acceded to the plot of the chieftain of his Ton-Ton Macoutes, Ismaila Gwarzo, to fabricate a coup d'état. Those who succeed as, or are suspected of acting as, couriers of details of the secret kangaroo court proceedings of those alleged to be involved in the coup, are rounded up, tried in minutes and sentenced to stretches varying from seven years to life imprisonment.

The standard charge is "concealment to treason". The chairman of the Campaign for Democracy is already among the victims of this madness, and the two ex-military rulers of Nigeria were also jailed for "levying war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria". Countless others have been held without being charged for the crime of "association" with the so-called coup plotters. Yet none of this appears to be a sufficient signal to the world.

Now that Abacha has prepared a list of 14 people, myself included, for a charge of "levying war against the Federal Republic of Nigeria by conspiring with others to explode bombs" and "causing explosion in several parts of Nigeria", perhaps some will see why Ogoniland is only the model for the actualisation of a totalitarian onslaught on politically sophisticated sections of the Nigerian polity which have dared expose and confront the power obsession of a minuscule but obdurate hegemony.

The only way Abacha knows how to deal with political opposition is not to negotiate, discuss or debate, but to liquidate its leaders. And if he cannot contrive this physically through his executioners (as with the more than 200 demonstrators mowed down by his soldiers in 1993), then he'll seek to repeat the phantom coup d'état or the tragic Saro-Wiwa experience.

This time, he is biting off more than he can chew. However much Abacha may harass or intimidate the democratic opposition, our position remains that Abacha is not the legitimate president of Nigeria any more than an armed robber is the legitimate owner of the property he has stolen.

It is very difficult to be surprised by this predictable despot and his gang. If I had been in Nigeria when the coup was engineered, I'd have been the first on the list of those to be arraigned. Although I am not an Ogoni, I would probably have featured in the list of those sacrificed for speaking out against genocide in Ogoniland.

So this whole orchestration has been set in motion since I became Abacha's most prominent nemesis. I was supposed to have been in Benin Republic on January 28, attending a meeting of labour leaders and students, where "we planned to disrupt the local government election".

At the time in question, I was in Davos in Switzerland at the World Economic Summit and among my witnesses are Nelson Mandela, Yasser Arafat, Kofi Annan and Binyamin Netanyahu. As though this was not enough, Abacha granted an interview to the Washington Times newspaper in February, where he repeated the allegation that I am a terrorist responsible for all the bomb blasts in Nigeria. The Washington Times is now facing a libel suit for the indiscretion of publishing this blatant lie.

I and other members of the democratic movement are already condemned to long jail sentences for another "treasonable offence". This combination of diversion, bloody-mindedness and lies will not intimidate the opposition into silence. Neither will it confuse any discerning observer as to the true state of things in Nigeria, which is the reign of terror unleashed by Abacha. Dissent in Nigeria will not go away until Abacha has gone.

Yet it is important to put Abacha into perspective. He knows that he is nothing without his foreign collaborators in Nigeria's agony.

What further proof is demanded by the world? Why have African leaders failed to halt Abacha's repetitious game or to challenge his transparent ploy of buying time? Take the regime's elaborate charade called "transition to civilian rule". Even as it becomes clearer by the day that Abacha is seeking to perpetuate himself as a civilian president, foreign governments continue to say let's wait a little longer. Really, he has promised us that this time, once this latest exercise is over, he will make his pronouncement.

HOWEVER, just in case the compliance of his hypnotised watchers and consumers of Nigerian oil begins to wear thin, Abacha has stumbled on the perfect plot: concoct treason charges against Soyinka, Enahoro and others, and while that case drags on in the court in which he is judge, jury and executioner, declare your presidential ambition. Yet the world watches in cold complicity as this conspiracy to eliminate all real and imaginary opponents to Abacha's dictatorship is concretised.

Those governments that believe that Nigeria's Godot is just around the corner in the labyrinths of Aso-Rock Fortress are no friends to the Nigerian people. They have forgotten their own history or, for reasons best known to them, have chosen to patronise us, to treat us as second-class subjects of the historical process.

Perhaps, though, their intent may be to deliver the message that we do not hear, or that we are too complacent in the certitude of justice to understand: which is that our destiny rests in no other hands but ours.

If that is so, we welcome the distressing signals and their implicit challenge. Our commitment remains to the enthronement of genuine democracy, as expressed on June 12, 1993, and to the permanent removal of the military from our lives. This, we know, is no small task but we are prepared for a marathon.

Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986



ILLUSTRATION: NICOLA JENNINGS

Under starter's orders

Michael White offers a guide to form in the British general election

IT IS going to be a very rough general election campaign. One in which the nation's wholesome party leaders will not hesitate for long before letting their acolytes say or do whatever they judge to be necessary to attain the power that each believes to be his due. Yet some of the most enduring images of the past year are much less abrasive. There is the spectacle of John Major and Tony Blair, sombre and besuited, as they walked together through Dunblane in the wake of Thomas Hamilton's massacre. "Tony and I," the Prime Minister said, more than once, as if this was a commonplace occurrence outside the stylised formalities of Remembrance Sunday.

One Tuesday in late June, Ashdown even took up cudgels in defence of Blair's wife against attack from Tory HQ. Old-fashioned gallantry notwithstanding, it is also certain that the civility is reciprocated. Prime Minister Blair would be quite content, eager even, to co-operate with the Liberal Democrat leader if the election numbers so dictate.

What does this tell us about those leaders? Or about the state of the nation's politics almost two decades after Margaret Thatcher's free-market radicals seized control of the creaking social democratic state Clem Attlee and his heirs struggled so mightily to create between 1945 and 1979?

Cynics and reformers, nihilists and sophisticated postmodernists, none of them in short supply, will say that it shows that the main parties are all but hand-in-glove to share what remains of the spoils of a decayed political system. Above all, that it doesn't matter which of them runs the country, because financiers like George Soros, supra-national pols' like Helmut Kohl, or the soaring GNP of South Asia — the second wave of Asian industrialisation — will really determine Britain's collective European fate as the millennium approaches. "One day they will only want to buy our wine and our cheese, and at prices they dictate," as a gloomy German SPD official once put it.

There is validity in every jibe, but not too much. Besides, they represent the counsels of despair. Australian leftists who say there may not be more than an inch of difference between their own parties — "but it's an inch worth fighting for" — are making a more wholesome judgment.

A more generous assessment might conclude that there is a compatibility of temperament between the three party leaders, all dutiful family men, born between 1941 and 1953, in varying degrees — significantly varying — children of the great post-war surge in prosperity.

Just so, there is a compatibility in the policy programmes they will offer the electorate, very different from Despatch Box battles barely a decade ago. Yet those propositions do not amount to neo-Butskellism in policy terms, a revival of notions of so-called consensus in the 1950s when R A Butler and Hugh Gaitskell were supposed, or so the Economist quipped, to agree on everything.

It was never much more than a posh joke. Then as now, New Labour's instincts remain more interventionist, more pro-active, more statist, however much its activism is clothed in the language of managed markets and of community, European Community included. They embrace the market, but they wish to steer it.

As for the personalities, there again sharp differences and antagonisms remain. Since only the very naive or disingenuous believe that a politician's personality does not greatly affect his policies, a Blair premiership will make itself felt very quickly.

As the Labour leader put it: "I do not intend to lead this country like John Major has done. If there are arguments to have, I will have them. If there are decisions to be taken, I will take them. And I will take them in the interests of the country." Does that sound vaguely familiar? You bet.

There is a Thatcheresque self-certainty at the centre of Blair's public personality. That is not to say he does not have private doubts. Who would not when facing up to the prospect of becoming the youngest prime minister since Lord Liverpool, who succeeded the (uniquely) assassinated Spencer Percival in 1812. He was just 42.

As has been noted, the Labour leader likes to surround himself with gurus: Peter Thompson, his Oxford-and-Oz vicar; Derry Irvine, QC, his pupil-master; Gordon Brown, his erstwhile mentor; Peter Mandelson, his personal spin-physician; Alastair Campbell, the sorcerer's turbulent apprentice. Thatcher, too, had a court. As her memoirs reveal, even she had doubts, though she hid them well enough at the time. But at bottom Tony Blair despises John Major for the same reason Lady Thatcher has come to despise him. He thinks the Prime Minister is a trimmer, who bends with every passing breeze which comes to blow his cabinet off course. "The difference between us", he told Major one Question Time, "is that I will not buckle under pressure." This is Blair as conviction politician: the laddie's not for turning.

What about Major, what does he think? Looking across the Despatch Box, he surely sees a middle-class, public school smoothie, all style and no substance.

He sees the kind of condescension in his manner that so irritated the teenage Major, already a politics junkie, when he heard the local Labour MP, Colonel Marcus Lipton, in Brixton in the 1950s. "Feudal," the thin-skinned future prime minister once called it. He hates being patronised — one reason why Paddy Ashdown annoys him even more than Blair — with holier-than-thou pledges everyone knows the Lib Dem leader will never be called upon to honour. There are days when Major almost spits back at him in frustration.

Another of these middle-class do-gooders, what do they know about the real knocks of life, he seems to be asking. What about leaving school at 16 with 3 O levels and elderly parents to care for? It is pointless to say that Ashdown's adolescence was troubled by financial insecurity (his father's farm failed) and that, at 18, he joined the Royal Marines, not the Brigade of Guards. Or that Blair's father, Leo, rose through his own efforts, from illegitimacy and adoption in Govan, through the army and the law to professional success in Durham; a Thatcherite paradigm of self-improvement, who was struck down by a heart attack as he prepared to find a Tory, yes Tory, seat.

His family background may be as insecure as that of the gnome-making Major-Balls, but Blair survived family misfortune to scramble on to post-war Britain's meritocratic ladder, much as Thatcher and Heath had done, albeit from greater initial disadvantage.

So in a different way did Ashdown, from the Marines to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, though he was actually unemployed and near penniless when first elected in Yeovil in 1983. What adversity has given both of them, apart from the natural self-confidence of the system's winners, is an awareness that it is also easy to be one of the system's losers. In Blair's case, facing the prospect that his father might die, it also seems to have cemented his teenage faith: for the first time since Sir Alec Douglas-Home briefly held the highest office, an increasingly godless Britain faces the prospect of a prime minister to whom going to church is a central part of his life.

Whether or not it is true that young Major lost a bus conductor's job to a jolly West Indian woman who had better maths, the Prime Minister has none of his rivals' reserves of self-assurance. What differentiates him from his genial brother, Terry, the anoraked chat-show star, is a mixture of unheroic political tradecraft and that vital, energising chip on the shoulder. Major believes he inherited a very difficult legacy from Thatcher in 1990 (no, you ruined it by taking us into the European exchange rate mechanism during your chancellorship, they cry back), won an election he was supposed to have lost in 1992 and has kept an increasingly fractious party in office — also against the odds — with a dwindling majority ever since.

No one ever accused Major of having a strategic vision, but he has the tactical wiles of a Harold Wilson: Major as tactical opportunist, keeping the show on the road where better men would long since have failed. The Brixton boy may not have been to Oxford, but he has street-smarts and that priceless political asset — being under-estimated — that keeps him in the game.

THERE are even smart Tories who believe that Major tilts one way, then the other, on tax or Europe, precisely to keep the party off balance. "See, you can't manage without me," is the subliminal message.

So Britain enters what may prove a watershed election. On one side, the Government offers more of the same, a modified version of the Anglo-Saxon model, the harsh and restless vision of free-market individualism in which everyone stands a chance of becoming seriously richer or seriously poorer. It will be risky, but, odds on, it will be fun.

On the other side, Blair offers something closer to the European model that Germans call social solidarity. More collectivist, more concerned with society's more vulnerable members, more determined to create jobs, preferably in the manufacturing sector, the impulse is not simply retrospective or sentimental, the postmodern equivalent of William Morris's hunger for the pre-industrial past. It wants to work globally, live locally. Unfortunately, the phrase is Stephen Dorrell's.

So, May 1's contest will be fought between three upwardly-mobile members of Britain's increasingly fluid middle class, each emblematic in their way, each representative of someone's aspiration — or someone else's horror of the same.

In Britain's post-imperial mode, anything goes — as long as it wears slippers.

Larry Elliot on the euro dilemma facing Chancellor Kohl

Bonn falls short of mark

THE Germans love their super-powerful currency, and this is why. In July 1920, a US dollar was worth 40 marks. Two years later, it was 493 marks. A year after that, one dollar bought 4 million marks, and by November 1923 you could get 4.2 trillion marks for one greenback. Almost 1,800 printing presses worked round the clock to supply bank notes.

Germany in 1923 represented text-book hyperinflation. It has never been forgotten, not least because it fatally weakened the legitimacy of the fledgling Weimar Republic and paved the way for Hitler's rise to power.

By contrast, Germany has been Europe's pre-eminent post-war economic power. The strengthening mark has underpinned rising living standards by keeping the cost of imports down, and for all its recent problems Germany is still the country against which the rest of the Continent measures itself. The German model of macro-stability, coupled with investment in plant, education and training, and R&D, has influenced the British Labour party.

Germany also holds the key to the European policy of the next UK government. If it seems that Germany cannot make it into the first wave for monetary union, the whole project will be delayed for at least two years.

The likelihood of that happening will become clearer in May, shortly after the British general election, but there is no doubt that a postponement would give a Blair government that is pro-European but hesitant about the single currency a welcome breathing space.

But for Germany these are still uneasy times. The over-valuation of the mark in 1995 led to a period of slow growth, soaring unemployment and rising budget deficits. Hitting the convergence criteria means higher taxes or lower subsidies; both intensify innate public scepticism towards giving up the mark.

For all the wishful thinking by the British right, however, Germany is not a country in terminal decline. It has invested heavily over the years in skills and plant, it has restructured large chunks of its manufacturing base and is well-placed to take advantage of booming export markets. There is tension between those who believe Germany is profoundly uncompetitive and those who want the model of Rhenish capitalism protected from Anglo-Saxon laissez-faire policies.

A more serious problem may be the outcome of the Kohl government's attempt to railroad a reluctant population with blanket advertising campaigns and fireside chats aimed at persuading Germans that the euro will be as strong as the mark and that any backsliding will be a betrayal of Germany's destiny to forge the new Europe.

That looked a lot easier 12 months ago than it does today. Chancellor Helmut Kohl's half-hearted dealings with the miners last week, in which he gave in to many of their demands, showed that he has no stomach for the slash-and-burn attacks on the post-war settlement seen in Britain.

The German coal industry is massively inefficient but Germany as a whole is not. Germans are well educated, they are efficient and productive, and feel they deserve a share of the profits from Rhenish capitalism. Who can blame them? Not the German government, it appears.

Mr Kohl's finance minister, Theo Waigel, is spearheading the campaign to sell the euro, primarily through repeated insistence that a brave attempt at hitting the Maastricht convergence criteria will not be good enough for putative members.

The reason for this is simple: Germany would like the single currency to begin with just a hard-core group of six or seven, which would include itself, France and the Benelux countries. At the heart of the German policy machine there are officials who believe that the hard-core group could be an optimal currency area, linked by historical and cultural ties, a common set of economic beliefs, and big enough to benefit from economies of scale and reductions in transaction costs.

Italy is not thought to form part of an optimal currency area. But the reluctance to allow Italy in from the outset is also in part political: the notion that the euro will be as stable as the mark, and the European Central Bank as credible as the Bundesbank, will be easier to sell if Italy's entry is delayed.

Such a strategy will be fine, so long as Germany meets the Maastricht criteria. There is no good economic reason to get hung up about whether budget deficits in 1997 are 2.9 per cent of gross domestic product or 3.1 per cent. But Mr Kohl and Mr Waigel have impaled themselves on a hook with their "three means three" mantra: if the rules are bent to allow Germany in, then why cannot they be bent to admit Italy?

The crunch will come within the next two months. If the forecasts from the Five Wise Men in early May suggest a growth rate of less than 2 per cent this year, or if the figures for tax revenues come in much worse than expected, it will be clear that Germany's budget deficit will rise to 4 per cent of GDP this year.

That is too large to be bridged by the sort of mini-budget package already being prepared quietly in Bonn, which would probably raise petrol tax to keep the Greens sweet. The Bundesbank — the conscience of the German people when it comes to Maastricht — would not wear it.

Nor is it likely, however, that Hans Tietmeyer, the Bundesbank's president, would look kindly on the delay predicated on a relaxation of the criteria so that more countries could qualify at a later date. That, one would imagine, would give Mr Tietmeyer apoplexy.

There are only two realistic scenarios. The first is that Germany realises it is going to miss the criteria by a mile and forces a postponement. What would happen then is that a small country such as Luxembourg would be deputed to call for a delay so that Mr Kohl doesn't get egg all over his face.



The second scenario is that Germany cannot quite make it but still takes its place at the centre of a hard core. In that case, there would be less "three means three" from Mr Waigel and instead reassurance from Mr Tietmeyer about how the important thing is the "sustainability" of public finances. It should not be forgotten that Messrs Tietmeyer and Kohl are very close.

Of course, the Italians would then bellyache, with good reason. The Prodi government has been helped in its attempts to meet the budget deficit criteria by the fall in Italian long-term interest rates, which has dramatically reduced the cost of servicing Italy's debt burden.

But would the Italians, in a fit of pique, then try to block the setting up of an inner core at the European Council meeting to be held in spring 1998? Unlikely, because that would be the quick route to the scenario Rome most dreads: a market bloodbath in which Italian bond yields go through the roof and the budget deficit explodes.

Of course, the possibility of delay is not recognised in Bonn, any more than leaving the exchange rate mechanism was an option for Britain in 1992. But, looking at the ghastly policy vacuum left in London after Black Wednesday, it would be as well if contingency plans were in place.

In Brief

NATWEST Markets, which is attempting to live down the ravages of a $140 million options scandal, was dealt another blow when four senior managers parted company from the bank. Three of the executives are understood to have lost their jobs as part of NWM's shake-up of its debt markets business.

THE most bitterly contested disciplinary case arising out of the collapse of Barings bank ended with former treasury and risk chief Ian Hopkins struck off the City's register of directors and banned from any financial management role until 2000.

THE future of the Kvaerner Govan shipyard on the Clyde, and its workforce of 1,300, was plunged into doubt with confirmation that a $320 million Ministry of Defence order for two Royal Navy oil tankers was to be placed with a rival yard at Barrow-in-Furnes.

ELIZABETH Forsyth, the 60-year-old former business aide to Asil Nadir, has been cleared by the appeal court of handling $630,000 of stolen money. She is likely to seek compensation from the Serious Fraud Office.

THE Personal Investment Authority came under fire from MPs for its handling of the UK pensions mis-selling scandal as it emerged that the watchdog has spent $20 million to resolve a mere 1 per cent of cases.

APPLE, the personal computer company, is to sack 2,700 workers, a fifth of its workforce, in the latest move to ensure its survival.

UNION Bank of Switzerland, one of the world's most powerful banks and a pillar of Swiss society, is to distance itself from the "Nazi gold" scandal by changing its name to UBS.

UGANDA'S hopes were dashed when a World Bank-IMF initiative to lift the debt burden of the world's poorest countries was delayed a year.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates March 17	Sterling rates March 10
Australia	1.9985-2.0009	2.0318-2.0340
Austria	18.88-18.91	19.19-19.21
Belgium	55.34-55.44	56.24-56.31
Canada	2.1748-2.1779	2.1950-2.1968
Denmark	10.24-10.26	10.40-10.40
France	9.05-9.06	9.19-9.20
Germany	2.6848-2.6882	2.7272-2.7293
Hong Kong	12.26-12.29	12.39-12.40
Ireland	1.0183-1.0210	1.0276-1.0294
Italy	2,687-2,691	2,710-2,713
Japan	196-.28-196.57	194.80-195.01
Netherlands	3.0203-3.0239	3.0701-3.0722
New Zealand	2.2833-2.2891	2.2784-2.2810
Norway	10.86-10.89	10.93-10.94
Portugal	270.16-270.58	273.64-273.92
Spain	227.93-228.25	231.22-231.46
Sweden	12.27-12.29	12.17-12.19
Switzerland	2.3157-2.3189	2.3671-2.3697
USA	1.5868-1.5878	1.6015-1.6022
ECU	1.3846-1.3860	1.4032-1.4051

FTSE100 Share Index down 54.1 at 4378.3. FTSE 250 Index down 37.2 at 4692.0. Gold up $1.50 at $351.50.

Minimum wage 'not bad for business'

LABOUR's hopes of making the minimum wage a focal part of its general election strategy were boosted this week when a survey revealed that almost 80 per cent of firms said they would be unaffected by a pay floor of £3.25 an hour, *writes Larry Elliott.*

The study of nearly 1,000 firms conducted by the recruitment organisation Reed Personnel Services found that even at £4 an hour, only one-third of businesses felt that a minimum wage would be bad for their company.

Ian McCartney, Labour's chief employment spokesman, said: "This survey has nailed the Tory lie that a minimum wage is bad for business. Companies of all sizes across all areas of the economy have rejected the Tory scare campaign."

Mr McCartney added that the report highlighted three points — that a minimum wage would not cost jobs, that businesses would implement it, and that the corporate sector recognised it would be fully involved in setting the rate through Labour's two-year consultation and Low Pay Commission.

The Government will argue during the election campaign that Labour's support for a minimum wage would put in jeopardy the recent improvement in official unemployment figures by adding to the costs of businesses. Ministers will contrast the sharp fall in the number of people out of work in the UK with the rise in joblessness in the rest of Europe, where minimum wages are in operation.

Alec Reed, chairman of Reed Personnel Services, said: "The vast majority of UK businesses predict they would be unaffected by a national minimum wage. However, this report shows how important it would be for any future implementation to be handled carefully and not railroaded through."

Seumas Milne adds: The scale of hidden unemployment was highlighted last week when Labour's employment spokesman Peter Hain said "real" joblessness in Britain stood at more than 4 million.

Using the Government's most recent Labour Force Survey, Mr Hain said that 4,401,000 people were looking for work at the end of last summer — more than double the official count then of 2,043,000.

Mr Hain's figure — based on the Government's claimant count plus the number of people looking for work but unable to claim the Job Seeker's Allowance (excluding students) and those on compulsory government schemes — is in line with estimates made by the Trades Union Congress and the independent Unemployment Unit.

A report by the Black Employment Institute, published last week, estimates that half a million black people are out of work — double the level in the official claimant count.

Although the claimant count has fallen since last summer to 1,815,300, the more comprehensive total is almost certain still to be more than 4 million. The Unemployment Unit puts the underlying unemployment rate at 17 per cent compared with the official rate of 6.5 per cent.

While economic growth is cutting joblessness, the scale of hidden unemployment is far greater than in other industrial countries. The tendency for British workers to drop out of the official labour market has been fuelled by a sharp increase in the number of long-term sick and disabled people, because the Government has encouraged dole claimants to shift to other benefits.

Mr Hain said a Labour government would conduct a review to introduce a "politically impartial measure" of unemployment.

Arms bazaar . . . in many of the towns that have fallen, army officers have emerged to take over rebel operations

Albanian army falls apart before rebels

Rémy Ourdan in Tirana

AS ALBANIA sinks deeper and deeper into anarchy, an increasing number of officers and soldiers in the army are deserting or resigning. Some have even joined the ranks of the rebels, who have taken over many strategic military bases, arms depots and barracks.

The current chaos, while an expression of rebellion against President Sali Berisha, his party and his secret police, also marks a major failure on the part of an army desperately seeking its own identity.

The Albanian army has been defeated and humiliated: it has been ordered to put down a popular uprising, forced to look on helplessly as its ranks are depleted, and placed under the control of the secret services.

The military defeat has been spectacular — without a single shot being fired. Insurgents have attacked members of the secret police, Shik, and sometimes even uniformed police whenever they have stood in the way of demonstrators.

No army garrison has so far managed to withstand a group of rebels determined to take over a barracks or an arms depot. And whenever troops have been ordered to open fire, they have had no hesitation in disobeying their senior officers.

Rebels in the south have seized the Pasha Liman submarine base, the naval base at Sarande, which has missile-equipped patrol boats, and large arms depots in Vlore, Tepelena and Gjirokastër.

The tank unit at Bajkaji, near Sarande, needed no prompting from the people to join the rebel camp. The insurgents' latest major trophy has been the air force base at Kucova, where they seized 19 fighter aircraft. This means they have taken control of one-fifth of Albania's fighter contingent of MIGs.

Air force pilots have gone before television cameras to express their anger with the government. They claim they disobeyed orders to resist the advancing rebels. One soldier said: "I only fight against Albania's enemies, and certainly not against my people." Two pilots deserted to Italy last week.

The rebels have taken immediate advantage of their military successes. In Vlore, they have dispersed artillery and explosives in hills around the town. In Tepelena, guns are pointing at the central square, through which any attacking forces will be forced to pass. Warships in Sarande fired a symbolic salvo to prove that an attack from the sea could be foiled.

Everywhere along the roads and in the mountains of southern Albania heavy weapons are ready to be used in battle. And army deserters who have gone over to the rebel cause are fully prepared to employ them.

Serving and former officers have gradually imposed their authority on the insurrectionary people's committees. Xhevat Koçiu, the military leader of the insurgents in Sarande, has become a symbolic figure in the movement.

Koçiu, a retired colonel, used to be a fervent supporter of Berisha. He now strides up the steps of the town hall every morning and harangues the crowd. He wants to forbid the carrying of weapons by children and would prefer military bases to be guarded by army deserters rather than by overexcited young civilians.

He has done his best to prevent atrocities being committed. His political message is a moderate one, and he is concerned about the state of anarchy within his own ranks. Koçiu remains, however, a military commander and is organising the defence of his region.

In each of the towns that have fallen, an army officer has emerged and taken over rebel operations. Koçiu accepts that all these officers know each other well and have tried to co-ordinate their actions. But he denies any idea of a military *putsch* in southern Albania, insisting that it is only logical for an armed population to turn to experienced men to organise their defence.

"The Albanian army no longer exists," claims one Western diplomat. "It is refusing to obey. It has no military motivation and no political clout. What is more, its men are not properly trained, and their equipment is non-existent or obsolete."

The Albanian army's death warrant was effectively signed by Berisha when he handed over the command of the security forces — the army, police and secret services — to General Bashkim Gazidede, head of the Shik.

The time when Enver Hoxha built 730,000 bunkers in the mad hope of creating an impregnable communist bastion now seems very distant. After joining Nato's partnership for peace, Albania was, until recently, making considerable efforts to renew itself.

The regime's hopes of turning the Albanian army into a more sophisticated fighting force that would be acceptable to its allies have been shattered by the popular uprising. Many Albanian soldiers are now to be seen straggling along the country's roads. Others, wearing coloured headbands and toting Kalashnikovs, have occupied Hoxha's bunkers — incongruous shelters for rebels who do not quite know where they are going.

(March 14)

Debate over marriage splits Algerians

Jean-Pierre Tuquoi

ALGERIAN society is divided over the issue of marital law. El Irscha Oual Islah (Religious Orientation and Reform), an association close to "moderate" Islamist elements in the Hamas movement, last week announced that it intended to collect 3 million signatures "to promote the marriage code".

The association intends to counter a move made a few days ago by 13 non-religious feminist associations which, in a campaign to improve married women's rights, took several full-page ads in the press calling for the abolition of "the most discriminatory articles of the marriage law". They hope to get 1 million signatures in support of their campaign.

The current marriage law, which has been in force since 1984, is largely based on Koranic *sharia* law. It allows a man to marry more than one wife (though no more than four); and it confers a key role on the future wife's "matrimonial tutor", who is "either her father or one of her close relatives".

Article 39 stipulates that "the wife is bound to obey her husband and grant him respect in his capacity as head of the family". Article 48 states that divorce "takes place at the wishes of the husband". The wife can request it only if her husband has been absent for more than a year "without a valid excuse" or refuses "to share his wife's bed for four months".

The feminist associations that launched the debate at the end of February, a few weeks before the opening of the general election campaign, have called for the abolition of some articles and changes in others.

Last week MRI-Ennahda (Movement for Islamic Renewal), a small Islamist party close to the regime, opposed the feminists' amendments on the grounds that they were "in contradiction with the precepts of religion and the legacy of the Algerian nation's civilisation and culture".

That the El Irscha Oual Islah association should have got involved in the debate is particularly significant. An offshoot of Hamas — whose candidate in the 1995 presidential election got a quarter of the vote — the association controls by far the most powerful women's organisation in Algeria.

On top of that, it has influential allies and intends to use them. To collect its 3 million signatures, it has said it will call on the help of the Islamist associations which, on December 21, 1989, staged the biggest women's demonstration yet organised in Algeria.

The expert view in Algeria is that "progressive women", who are cut off from Algerian society, have only a slim chance of managing to muster 1 million signatures, while their "moderate" Islamist counterparts look increasingly likely to reach their target of 3 million.

(March 7)

A fair deal for women in politics

EDITORIAL

WOMEN have always been kept on the sidelines of French public life. France, the birthplace of human rights, likes to preach to other countries and remind them of the universal principles that underpin its own republic.

Yet it is the peculiarly "macho" characteristics of French political life that now set it apart from other European democracies. France, along with Greece, brings up the rear when it comes to women's representation in parliament: only 5.6 per cent of deputies are women, slightly fewer than in 1946 (5.7 per cent), just two years after they were given the vote and the same political rights as men.

The preamble to the 1946 constitution, which was retained in the 1958 constitution, stated that "the law guarantees women, in every domain, equal rights to those of men". Half a century later, the most blatant form of inequality is still the rule in French politics.

This is an indefensible and inadmissible state of affairs that needs to be brought to an end. One of the most elementary requirements of democracy is at stake.

It is not enough to urge women to fight for the place that constitutional principles grant them under law but which are in fact denied them. That simply perpetuates the oppressive weight of tradition. The time has come to impose on male politicians what they have been neither able nor prepared to bring about through the ordinary mechanisms of democracy.

Two objections are traditionally raised against instituting either a quota system or parity. One contends that a precedent might be set that would destabilise the republican conception of citizenship and result in a compartmentalisation of communities. Women, the argument goes, do not form a community but are citizens in their own right, just like men.

The second objection is more difficult to counter. Many women believe that the implementation of quotas or parity would turn them into second-class members of parliament. But even those who put forward this argument admit that the present situation cannot go on as it is.

The fight for equality is also something that can make great strides with the help of the law. The Socialist Party has set a good example by introducing a 30 per cent quota of women candidates for next year's general election.

Even if it is necessary to change the constitution in order to achieve it, all political parties should be forced to respect a minimum quota of women in their selection of election candidates.

(March 8)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
March 23 1997

Rappers capture Marseille's mix

A radical group's clever southern blend has taken it to the top of the charts, writes **Stéphane Davet**

THE Café Latin, in Marseille's old quarter, is full of noisy laughter. IAM, the rap group who have set up their headquarters there, are finishing lunch. There's lots of larking about, back-slapping and kissing of girls in between serious chats with people from the media, who have come to interview them about their long-awaited third album, L'Ecole du Micro d'Argent (The School Of The Silver Mike).

The café is only a stone's throw from Vieux-Port metro station by Marseille's old harbour, where, 10 years ago, members of the group used to hang about all day long doing nothing, like many other similarly bored and broke youngsters in a decaying city.

They found an answer in their shared love of hip-hop. They started cutting vinyl discs, going on independent radio stations and fantasising about the United States. Drawing on their fertile imagination, they tried to reflect daily life in their songs.

But soon books and films opened up new worlds. Instead of aping American heroes like so many Parisian groups, they gave themselves exotic names that reflected their interest in Egyptology, Africa and the Far East. Philippe Fragione renamed himself Akhenaton (the first pharaoh to have imposed a monotheistic religion); Eric Mazel became Kheops; Jo Mussard, a kung-fu freak and Taoist, started a new life as Shurik'N; Pascal Perez turned into Imhotep, Malek Brahimi into Sultan, and François Mendy into Kephren.

Philippe laughs as he remembers the time when they were down and out: "We were part of the scenery round Vieux-Port station, even in winter. One Christmas, a woman from the tourist office felt so sorry for us she came out and gave us a box of chocolates. I realised people were beginning to think I was a tramp."

They owed their salvation to an ability to express their feelings forcefully in songs. After first calling themselves Lively Crew, then B Boys Stance, they formed IAM in 1989.

IAM — which has variously stood for Imperial Asiatic Man, Invasion Arrivant de Mars, Indépendantistes Autonomes Marseillais and, simply, I Am — recorded a cassette called Concept, which impressed enough people to earn them support billing at concerts by the likes of Madonna and Public Enemy.

Their first album, De La Planète Mars, which came out in 1991, was one of the great hits of a French rap scene then still in its infancy. That same year the far-right weekly, Minute, let rip at them: "These pure products of North African ghettoes, the rappers of IAM, who see themselves as reincarnations of Egyptian deities, swear they are not in the business of politics. That claim is belied by every one of the hate-filled, hit-and-miss and extremely unartistic lyrics in their album."

What the album revealed was a highly original blend of regional influences. IAM's central concern was to rehabilitate the city of Marseille, rectify its much caricatured image, and demolish its reputation as a place tainted by violence, racism and the extremist National Front (FN), which had got 25 per cent of the vote at the last elections.

With typically southern volubility, IAM evoked Marseille's glorious past and its long tradition of acting as a racial melting pot, a tradition reflected in the origins of the groups' members — Italian (Philippe), Madagascan (Jo), Algerian-born French (Pascal), Algerian (Malek), Senegalese (François) and Spanish (Eric).

Their exuberant, insolent and, just occasionally, serious lyrics, intoned in a Marseillais accent, displayed an almost surrealist ingenuity. They interlarded the constantly changing slang of housing estates with mythological allusions. IAM had found their own identity somewhere between the lexicographical inventiveness of MC Solaar and the grinding venom of NTM (the rap group whose recent prison sentence for insulting the police is coming up on appeal).

In 1993, IAM's second album, Ombre Est Lumière (Shadow Is Light), which combined humour, bitterness, social criticism and a new-found pride in the city (Bernard Tapie's Olympic Marseille football team was riding high), showed that Marseillais rap had lost none of its zest.



Talk show . . . IAM's exuberant, ingenious lyrics excel at setting a scene and bringing characters to life

A single, Je Danse Le Mia, a droll and nostalgic evocation of IAM's funk period, went to the top of the charts and sold 600,000 copies. When IAM was voted "group of the year" in 1995, Philippe said "this victory is a tiny part of music's eternal victory over the failures of mankind". Exhausted by an 80-gig tour, the group then decided to take a breather.

Philippe, now married to a Moroccan and converted to Islam, produced an introspective solo album called Météque Et Mat (Half-Caste And Mat). In it, Philippe as Akhenaton mulls over his Neapolitan origins, family history, childhood memories and teenage fantasies.

"I spent almost all my adolescence with Arabs. They're culturally and physically very similar to southern Italians. I identified with the racism they suffered because my family had told me how they were given humiliating nicknames, beaten up and had stones thrown at them. It's sad to see how the children of those who fled fascism now vote for the FN."

IAM's worst nightmare came true when the town councils of Toulon, Orange, Marignane and Vitrolles fell to the FN, in whose eyes rap symbolises all that is anti-French. In May 1995, Ibrahim Ali, a Comoran teenager who belonged to B Vice, a hip-hop group close to IAM, was shot dead by an FN activist.

The uncharacteristically stark pessimism of IAM's latest album is clearly the product of their mounting anger and disgust. While the new version still has the striking rhyme patterns typical of East Coast American groups like DJ Premier and Wu-Tang Clan, the melancholy minimalism of its sombre musical texture was determined by the content of the songs.

"We originally composed 30 numbers," says Philippe. "But this time the funny, mystical or off-bent songs didn't stand up. Our lyrics have always been snapshots of the period we live in. The present period doesn't exactly make us feel optimistic."

LISTENING to IAM is a bit like following a television news crew on the job. They have always excelled at setting a scene and bringing characters to life. In their company, we share the temptations of a working-class kid, join a father in weeping for his son, and experience, in gripping fast motion, the inexorable downward spiral of the quality of life on housing estates in Demain, C'Est Loin (Tomorrow Is A Long Way Off), the tour de force that closes the album.

Paradoxically perhaps, there are no political slogans in their songs. The enemy is never mentioned. They have adopted this stance partly because they distrust political parties. "Cultural, social and political activities are all closely interconnected in Marseille. Paris groups are rarely wooed by politicians, but we are."

IAM tend to avoid invective and seem to imply they do not agree with NTM's hardcore approach. "We don't advocate violence, which has never solved anything," says Pascal, the youngest member of IAM. "What's the point of a rapper insulting the cops or young kids burning down a supermarket if the regime takes advantage of their violence to crack down even harder?"

The apparent detachment of IAM's lyrics does not mean they do not feel committed as citizens. Their response to the FN, "a party of fascists and collaborators", is to engage in neighbourhood social work. One of their aims is to get youngsters to vote. "To do that round here, you have to grab them by the scruff of their necks and frogmarch them to the ballot box," says Philippe.

The stricter immigration legislation just introduced by the government has naturally got up the noses of IAM, who symbolise a multicultural Marseille.

Racism is still a fact of life for some members of the group. Jo laughs wryly at the problems he faces because of his dark skin: "Ten years ago I swore that if I was successful I'd buy myself a four-wheel drive. But now I've got one I get stopped at least twice a week by cops who find it odd that a black could own such a beautiful car."

(March 6)

Lorca film touches raw Spanish nerve

Marie-Claude Decamps

THE cinema has often run into problems when portraying legendary historical figures. Alan Parker's Evita, in which Madonna plays Eva Peron, caused howls of protest in Argentina. A similar storm of controversy has now blown up in Spain with the release of Muerte En Granada, a film about the Andalusian poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, who was killed by Francoists in Granada in 1936.

The billing of the Cuban-American actor Andy Garcia as Lorca has had as hostile a reception in Spain as Madonna's portrayal of Evita had in Argentina. This is hardly surprising, as both films take enormous liberties with the biographical truth.

Muerte En Granada, a Spanish-American production directed by the Puerto Rican Marcos Zurinaga, has been unanimously dismissed by Spanish critics as an awkward farrago of all that is bad in both film cultures.

There is plenty that is typically American, from the contrived happy end to the gallons of gore filmed with the chiaroscuro effects of the classic Hollywood thriller. The Spanish touch is provided by gaggles of gypsy women, scorching arenas and *toreadors* punctually impaled at 5pm, out of respect for Lorca's most celebrated poem, Las Cinco de la Tarde.

Some have singled out the scenario for criticism. It is certainly not a biography of Lorca, whose outspokenness earned him many enemies, but rather an account of the obsessive and, they claim, implausible quest of a young Lorca admirer who fled the civil war with his family and took refuge in Puerto Rico.

Twenty years on, he courts danger by returning to Granada to investigate the poet's mysterious death. He discovers that Lorca was indeed killed on the orders of the Francoists, but also that it was done, for personal revenge, by his own father before he left for Puerto Rico, and by a colonel friend of his.

The poet's nephew, Manuel Fernandez Montesinos, whose father was shot at the same time as Lorca, told Le Monde: "It's all very childish and full of implausibilities. The figure of Federico is treated with a great deal of respect and even love, but I'm afraid the film will soon vanish without trace."

In view of the movie's rather over-the-top publicity campaign, which had Garcia reciting poetry on Lorca's supposed grave at Viznar, a few kilometres from Granada, to the clatter of photographers' flashlights, it is easy to see why the film has offended some people.

Granada, which has kept its painful secret for 60 years, is particularly touchy. The Irish historian, Ian Gibson, author of Federico Garcia Lorca (Faber, £9.99), says: "In fact nothing is known for certain about Lorca's final moments after his arrest on August 16, 1936. Nor do we know exactly who killed him or how. Was he tortured? Did he really get the 'three bullets up the arse' which a Francoist boasted he had fired to 'finish off the homosexual poet'?"

Muerte En Granada, on which Zurinaga worked for seven years, at least has the merit of paying a major tribute to the historical figure of Lorca and faithfully portraying several episodes in his life. It is an honest piece of work on "betrayed memory".

That is something that many people in Granada have failed to understand. Juan de Loxa, who runs the museum set up in the poet's house in Fuentevaqueros, is more pragmatic: "In the end, and despite its faults, the film will enable the public, who know little about Lorca, to discover him and want to read him. And that's important."

(March 8)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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The Washington Post

Zaire Rebel Leader Turns Statesman

Stephen Buckley in Uvira

LAURENT KABILA clambered off the platform in this east Zairian town recently and lumbered toward hundreds of wide-eyed recruits his rebel movement had just trained. It was their graduation ceremony, and he awkwardly shook hands and grasped shoulders of young men too awestruck to look him in the eye.

President Clinton he is not. But since Kabila's rebel movement in Zaire took off five months ago, he has sought to paint himself as more than just another insurgency leader stumbling out of the bush.

He has cultivated the media and wooed diplomats as he tries to craft an image of a statesman-diplomat who says he does not crave power but yearns for the rejuvenation of this poverty-wracked, corruption-weary central African nation.

A self-described "soldier-politician," Kabila, 56, has spent most of his adult life as an obscure professional guerrilla who has made deposing Mobutu Sese Seko — Zaire's leader since 1965 — his main cause. His latest campaign has been by far his most successful.

The rebel leader appears to have shaken his obscurity. Both within Zaire and without, his name no longer evokes the "Laurent who?" response that it did when the rebels began charging through eastern Zaire in late October.

"He has changed, and perceptions of him have changed," said Roger Winter, executive director of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, who spent a week with Kabila in January.

Since the mid-1960s, Kabila has led the People's Revolutionary Party, which until the past few months espoused Marxist ideology. During the '60s, Kabila fought alongside legendary Cuban guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Zaire.

Since then, he has shuttled all over the continent, spending time in Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda. He also has headed an enclave near Uvira, where, one Zairian scholar wrote, "he had for all practical purposes become a typical African warlord rather than a revolutionary guerrilla leader."



Leading man . . . Kabila shows off new recruits for his army in Uvira last week PHOTOGRAPH: JEAN-MARC BOUJU

He re-emerged last October as leader of a four-party coalition called the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire. He preached free-market economics and an end to the debilitating corruption that pervades this sprawling nation of 46 million people.

At first, he drew guarded responses, especially among compatriots. But that has changed in recent weeks. Opposition lawmakers have visited him in Goma with increasing frequency and openness, and some factions — such as university students in Kinshasa — have embraced him after initially scoffing at his message and movement.

Tens of thousands of teen-agers and young adults have latched on to the movement, signing up to become soldiers. And crowds have generally greeted him with enthusiasm.

One reason may be his easy-going, jovial air. His earthshaking laugh often punctuates hour-long speeches to crowds, which routinely wait for hours to hear him. Recently, he has ditched alligator shoes for Nike running shoes.

Courting the international media has been crucial to his success. He has become increasingly media-savvy. He beckons reporters to follow him on his travels throughout eastern Zaire. He takes their home telephone numbers. He holds news conferences almost daily. He provides security through territory the rebels hold.

That kind of access and assistance have helped him publicize his message and kept him planted on television screens all over the world since October.

Kabila has won over diplomats by shunning extremist statements and hasty acts that could alienate key potential allies such as the United States. Though Washington remained the anti-communist Mobutu's ally throughout the Cold War, it has since distanced itself from his corrupt regime, and U.S. representatives in central Africa have met with Kabila on numerous occasions.

For several weeks, for example, Kabila refused to attack the Tingi Tingi refugee camp in eastern Zaire, at the request of the United Nations and the United States. The rebels did overrun the camp recently, but Kabila continued to offer a safe corridor for the refugees' return home to Rwanda. Aid workers and the Zairian government, however, contend that the rebels have been executing former Rwandan soldiers and militiamen among the refugees.

Kabila also has restrained his anti-Mobutu rhetoric. He has insisted he would not imprison the ailing president, saying: "Mobutu does not have to fear for his safety. Let him come back home." Mobutu has spent much of the conflict in Europe, receiving treatment for prostate cancer.

"He has won a lot of support by consistently emphasizing that it's not enough for Mobutu to go. There has to be a change in the system," Winter said. "He has become a symbol of the possibility of fundamental change."

Panic in a Cloned Embryo

EDITORIAL

AN ASTONISHING amount of nonsense has been talked about the prospects of human cloning since Dolly the sheep burst on the genetic scene late last month. Discussions of cloning factories, transplant farms and other ghastly scenarios have assumed that a society that permits making a genetic copy of someone or something will automatically be willing to go ahead and create virtual human robots with no rights of any kind. Other scenarios ignore that a cloned embryo would still have to be carried to term in a womb like a normal pregnancy, not hatched in assembly-line jars like an Aldous Huxley-style factory. Echoing the panic, several states and at least one member of Congress have rushed to introduce bills banning the cloning of a human, as Great Britain and several other nations already do.

Sorting out fact from fiction in the panic is one task of the National Bioethics Advisory Panel convened by President Clinton, which wrapped up two days of public hearings last week. Other hearings have sprouted, clone-like, around town and in Congress; Dolly's actual cloner, the Scottish scientist Ian Wilmut, has addressed a Senate subcommittee and the National Institutes of Health. President Clinton convened the bioethics group last month when the news became public, asking them to evaluate laws already on the books regarding cloning research and to weigh what types of research should and should not go forward. He also offered an opening position, calling for a 90-day moratorium on federal funding of human cloning research and requesting a similar voluntary moratorium by private researchers — who do most of the work in this field.

The president urged humility and reverence, saying human life is sacred and we should "resist the temptation to replicate ourselves." A raft of religious leaders have echoed that message in testimony to the bioethics advisory panel. But the issues before the panel — or other bodies that might regulate cloning — are not metaphysical but practical. The question, in light of Mr. Wilmut's breakthrough, is no longer whether cloning is possible or whether someday we will have to face the possibility of knowing how to do it. Clearly, some day, somebody will know. And since regulation of human reproduction can go only so far, at some point someone, somewhere, may clone a human being. But that is no reason for everyone else to abandon all efforts at line-drawing or to assume that cloning is so new and bizarre that logic and traditional moral distinctions cannot be brought to bear.

Harold Varmus, director of the National Institutes of Health, broke what had been an uninterrupted parade of predictions of doomsday by pointing out that there might actually be types of human suffering cloning could alleviate — even, in certain circumstances, that cloning might be the best way to alleviate — and that overreaction to the scarier aspects of cloning could needlessly block a full understanding of the possibilities as well as the dangers. Since then, others as disparate as Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Cardinal John O'Connor have urged the distinction between a premature and ill-advised ban on research and a later, more considered ban or regulation on the procedures that research may ultimately turn up. They are right. Even if the dangers of cloning prove overwhelming, open-eyed caution is a better defense against them than determined ignorance.

Internet Use More Than Doubles

Rajiv Chandrasekaran

ALMOST ONE in four people over age 16 in the United States and Canada now use the Internet, more than twice the number of people who were online 18 months ago, according to a study released last week.

The study, conducted by Nielsen Media Research and an electronic commerce industry group called CommerceNet, found that of this group, 17 percent were using the multimedia World Wide Web, compared with 8 percent 18 months ago. Internet usage has increased from 10 percent to 23 percent, the survey found.

"It's a startling increase," said Paul B. Lindstrom, a vice president at Nielsen. "This shows that the Internet is truly becoming a mass-market phenomenon."

Translated into real numbers, that means about 50.6 million people in the United States and Canada are using the Internet, while about 37.4 million are now using the Web. The survey, first conducted in the fall of 1995 and generally considered in the computer industry to be one of the most comprehensive studies of Internet use, counted people who said they used the global computer network at least once in the month before they were questioned.

The survey, conducted in December and January, found that people using the Internet are becoming more representative of the population as a whole. The proportion of women online increased significantly, to 42 percent from 34 percent, while the percentage of people who said they were professionals or managers dropped to 39 percent from 50 percent.

"Not that long ago, the people using the Web tended to be a rather homogeneous group — young, upscale and rather well educated," Lindstrom said. "The big gains that we're seeing now are coming from outside that group."

The survey found that commerce on the Web was a mixed bag, with more people saying they browsed for goods but only a handful reporting having bought anything.

The number of computer users looking for information about products on the Web doubled — rising to 39 percent from 19 percent. But just 15 percent of respondents said they had purchased something online.

Industry experts say relatively few people are buying things largely because people are concerned about the security of using credit cards for online transactions.

"While the numbers confirm that the Internet has become an established shopping vehicle, clearly changes in technology, product offerings and perceptions are needed before most people will want to buy online," Randall Whiting, CommerceNet's chief executive, said in a statement.

The survey was based on 6,600 telephone interviews with people age 16 or older from randomly selected households in the United States and Canada. The margin of error was not released.

Conspiracy Theory Dogs TWA Crash

Don Phillips

THE CRASH of Trans World Airlines Flight 800 has become the aviation equivalent of the Kennedy assassination.

No matter what evidence is presented by some of the world's best aviation-safety and law-enforcement investigators, and no matter how deeply the mainstream press probes and finds nothing, a segment of society has apparently decided that the Paris-bound Boeing 747 was brought down by a missile and that everyone who says otherwise is part of a coverup.

Such assertions have been hotly denied by James K. Kallstrom, the FBI agent in charge of the criminal investigation, and Jim Hall, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. Kallstrom has said that the people peddling such reports ought to "get a life."

But officials say the flap over the latest theories is causing investigators to waste resources to look into them, and is drawing attention away from an important lesson learned from the crash: It would not have happened if the plane's huge center fuel tank had had a system to prevent explosive vapors from building up inside.

Investigators agree the plane was brought down because something caused the volatile vapors in the center fuel tank to blow up, but they have not concluded what triggered that explosion. The possibility is still open that it was a missile, although the probers say they have found no evidence of it and are leaning toward mechanical failure as an explanation.

As an example of a diversion of resources, one air-safety investigator said the FBI lab originally had not even bothered to test red residue found on some seats on the plane because everyone from the safety board and the FBI agreed it was clearly the adhesive used in the seat's manufacture. But after a Riverside, California, newspaper, the Press-Enterprise, reported on March 10 that the residue was "consistent with solid missile fuel" — and the story was widely picked up — the FBI lab pushed tests of their samples ahead of more urgent tests.

"Guess what they found," the investigator said. "It was adhesive . . . We don't have the resources to do this kind of stuff, and that's what bothers me about this kind of journalism," he said.

In another example last week, attention has focused on what purportedly is a videotape of air-traffic-control radar screens at John F. Kennedy International Airport the night of the July 17 crash. It supposedly shows a missile streaking toward the plane just before it exploded, killing all 230 aboard.

A small group of people led by Pierre Salinger, former press secretary to President Kennedy, say the tape is part of evidence they have accumulated showing that a military accident — friendly fire — caused the crash.

In a Paris news conference last week, Salinger and the co-author of an investigative report, Michael Sommer, released what they said were photos taken from the videotape.

Salinger said the missile that struck the plane was in pursuit of a "drone" missile several thousand feet below as part of a secret anti-terrorism exercise being conducted by the U.S. Navy.

The FBI seized a copy of the videotape last week from the home of former airline pilot Richard D. Russell in South Daytona Beach, Florida, who gave it to Salinger's group. The tape is part of evidence being presented to a grand jury in New York that apparently is looking into whether crash evidence might have been obtained illegally.

Salinger's group sought to sell the tape to ABC News for a large amount of money, perhaps as much as $1 million, but the network rejected the proposal, an ABC spokeswoman said.

Defense Secretary William S. Cohen rejected Salinger's call for an investigation, saying, "Based on the information that I have there is no basis for such an allegation pertaining to a Navy ship or Navy missile.

"My understanding is that there has been a very thorough investigation in terms of any Navy assets," Cohen said. "There was a complete inventory of their missiles or weapons on board and there is no basis, no foundation for such an allegation that a Navy missile was involved in this tragedy."

Top safety-board investigators say they have seen all radar data from that tragic night, and one investigator said that any suggestion the radar tapes show a missile striking the plane is "a total fabrication."

From the first day, there were witnesses who saw a streak of light moving toward the plane. Most witnesses did not report any streaks, but investigators have interviewed the witnesses repeatedly in an attempt to determine what they saw.

The safety-board officials say the conspiracy theories will not sway them from a scientific and careful search for a cause wherever the search may lead, even if there is some last-minute surprise discovery of a terrorist act.

"I see this investigation taking the same course as our other investigations," Hall said.

Investigators have said from the beginning, and continue to say, that they have not ruled out any of three general causes — mechanical failure, a bomb or a missile. But while tests continue to find no evidence of a bomb or missile — or meteorites or space junk — a mechanical cause seems more likely. Investigators have been concentrating on the possibility that static electricity or some electrical malfunction set off the vapor in the tank.

Investigators say that all parties — including Boeing, the FBI and TWA — now agree that fumes in the nearly empty center fuel tank exploded and that the explosion was directed outward from the tank. That conclusion is based on a variety of tests conducted on wreckage.

There is also general agreement that whatever caused the tank to explode was not sufficiently powerful to have brought down the plane by itself — so the additional force of the exploding fuel tank was the ultimate event that led to the crash.

"We've got a fix right now" on the center fuel tank, the air-safety investigator said. If the tank had been filled with inert gases, rather than explosive ones," he said, "this wouldn't have happened."



Mother Teresa, left, along with the newly elected Superior General Sister Nirmala

Successor to Mother Teresa Named

Kenneth J. Cooper in Calcutta

AFTER TWO months of cloistered deliberations, the Missionaries of Charity last week selected a Hindu convert to succeed the ailing and aging Mother Teresa as leader of the Catholic order she founded in Calcutta's slums nearly a half-century ago.

In their near-unanimous choice of Sister Nirmala, 62, who had directed the order's spiritual wing, 130 senior nuns appear to have sought a combination of compassion and administrative skill to sustain a far-flung operation with 4,500 nuns and religious brothers at nearly 600 homes in more than 100 countries, including the United States.

The resolution of the succession issue removed the uncertainty that had surrounded the order because of the failing health of Mother Teresa, a Nobel Peace Prize winner for her dedication to aiding the world's poor.

Mother Teresa, 86, was hospitalized three times last year for heart problems and related ailments, leading her physicians and close associates to say at times in recent months that she was dying. Friends said her condition has improved enough lately to enable her to occasionally walk to the chapel at the order's international headquarters here.

Mother Teresa had said she wanted to retire more than a decade ago, but the order re-elected her in 1984 and 1990. Her recent illnesses prompted senior nuns to agree to choose a successor in an election that was postponed twice — in September because of her illness and again in February after a consensus could not be reached within two weeks in the closed deliberations.

Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta announced their choice in a brief statement that also said "Mother Teresa was present for the election and blessed Sister Nirmala."

Sister Nirmala had not been considered the most likely successor because she was not among Mother Teresa's four top assistants. She had directed the order's spiritual wing since it was created in 1979, overseeing a dozen homes in India, Europe, Latin America and the United States where the order's members seek spiritual rejuvenation.

Born a Brahman, a member of Hinduism's highest caste, Sister Nirmala grew up in Bihar, one of India's poorest states. Her family traces its ancestry to Nepal; her father was a military officer. She completed college and joined the Missionaries of Charity in the late 1950s.

The Sins of the Father

OPINION
Ellen Goodman

AT FIRST the newspaper ad barely registers. I am so immune to the endless presidential campaign that it passes across my line of vision like a subliminal political message.

There is the full-page photo of Bill crossing the White House lawn with Hillary and Chelsea saying that the "toughest job in the world isn't being president. It's being a parent."

What is this, another Dick Morris Moment in the creation of the Papa Presidency? Yet another message for the soccer moms?

Then a variation on this ad campaign appears on television. Once again Clinton talks about trying to meet the daily challenges of the world's toughest job worrying that "If I fail, the consequences could be serious." Once again the coy twist: "That job isn't being president. It's being a parent."

Now, I have no beef with that campaign or — surely — with the sponsors, an alliance of children's organizations seeking volunteers. But, after too many ads and too many images, I have used up my patience with this Father Figure.

I don't doubt or discount Bill Clinton's success as a parent. But history will not judge his administration by the fate of one child. Long after the first daughter has gone to college, he will be held accountable for the future of the most vulnerable of American children. The Clinton-era policy that will affect the most lives has nothing to do with curfews or school uniforms.

It goes by the moniker of "welfare reform." But maybe it should be known by the more damning title of Peter Edelman's article in the current Atlantic Monthly: "The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done."

Last September, Edelman, an assistant secretary of Health and Human Services, walked out of the administration as a protest against welfare "repeal." Then, like many others, he said little more during the campaign because, "Bob Dole would certainly have been worse."

But now in spare prose and unsparing detail, Edelman describes how a dreadful welfare program was transformed into a worse "reform." Why it is a catastrophe in the making.

Clinton signed onto a bill, writes Edelman, even though it is likely to move a million more children into poverty. Even though some 8 million families with children, many working poor with food stamps, will lose an average of some $1,300 apiece.

With protest, this Father Figure signed a bill that camouflaged budget cuts as "welfare reforms," eliminating programs for immigrants and for food stamp recipients — "the safety net under the safety net." But he made no protest at all about the bill's central provision that eliminated entitlement and turned welfare money over to the states to do with as they will. And, inevitably, that will mean less money to do less with.

Edelman walks through the "reform" like a tour guide through a disaster zone. A two-year time limit that pays no mind to the job market. A lifetime limit of five years of benefits no matter the economy. An exception for 20 percent of the recipients and never mind that 30 percent are disabled or caring for the disabled.

"The big hit, which could be very big," he warns, "will come when the time limits go into effect — in five years or less if the state so chooses — or when a recession hits." It will come gradually, in increased homelessness, malnutrition, drug abuse, violence.

Ronald Reagan campaigned against government spending and left a crushing national debt as his legacy. Now we have a man who campaigned as National Dad. Yet his legacy may well be the abandonment of the poorest children. As the man in the ad says, "the consequences could be serious."

U.S. Business Balks at Burma Sanctions

Paul Blustein

AS A PLACE to do business, there are few countries lousier than Burma. The average Burmese earns less than $300 a year, and the military regime keeps its heavy bureaucratic hand on an economy so poor its entire output is roughly equal to that of Eastman Kodak Co.

But despite Burma's lack of appeal as an overseas market, the U.S. corporate community is up in arms over a potent drive to sever U.S.-Burma economic ties on human rights grounds.

The Asian country's military leadership is the latest of several regimes to be targeted for U.S. economic sanctions — Cuba, Iran and Libya were hit last year — and corporate lobbyists are fuming that such penalties are getting out of hand. Restricting U.S. trade and investment with Burma, they fear, will make it much more difficult to stop similar measures from being imposed on other countries with human rights problems — and much greater economic significance as markets for U.S. goods.

"It's not just Burma; people are talking now about sanctions on Indonesia," said Howard Lewis, vice president for trade and technology at the National Association of Manufacturers. "They're talking about Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey. So companies view this not just as a matter of Burma, but a continuation of a really unfortunate trend that has mushroomed over the last couple of years."

In a report issued by the NAM this month, the business community is launching a campaign aimed at convincing Congress, the Clinton administration and the public that the United States is wielding sanctions far too often against objectionable regimes such as Burma's and that the main victims are usually U.S. companies and workers.

The report lists 35 countries that have, in one way or another, been hit by U.S. sanctions over the past four years, reversing a previous approach of "relative restraint" in the use of such measures. Although the report acknowledges that embargoes can work when many countries join in isolating a rogue nation — the multilateral sanctions against South Africa's apartheid regime being a prime example — it argues that Washington is increasingly resorting to futile gestures by acting unilaterally.

Burma is a particularly troubling test case for the corporate community. The nation's ruling clique, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), is among the most widely reviled in the world; it refused to accept the democratic opposition's overwhelming victory in a 1990 election and continues to crush dissent. The Nobel Prize-winning opposition leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, recently called on other nations to block investment in Burma.

Senior administration officials met last month to consider invoking an investment ban on Burma under a law passed last year. Meanwhile, a number of local U.S. jurisdictions, including Massachusetts and San Francisco, have enacted legislation to penalize multinational companies doing business in Burma by making them ineligible for state and city contracts.

The laws are starting to exert an effect; Apple Computer Inc., for example, withdrew from Burma last October in order to maintain its business supplying Massachusetts with educational computers. PepsiCo Inc. announced in January that it would pull all of its business out of Burma in recognition of toughened U.S. policy toward the country and in deference to the wishes of many shareholders and customers.

All this is disturbing for business — and awkward for the administration — because it raises serious questions of double standards: Can Burma be sanctioned for human rights violations without the same being done to richer countries?

Especially ticklish is the issue of China, because President Clinton bases much of his case for "engagement" there on the contention that the best way to promote democracy is through economic growth and the development of a middle class.

The administration, one U.S. official said, may have to resort to the argument that applying sanctions to Burma makes sense because, unlike China, "it doesn't have the world's fastest-growing economy, doesn't have a billion people, and doesn't have a military that can destabilize the whole Pacific Rim." Drawing a distinction between Burma and Indonesia — a country with a thriving economy and the world's fourth-largest population — will be even trickier, administration officials admit.

Human rights advocates assert that U.S. sanctions against Burma, even if not followed by other countries, would at least encourage other countries into taking a harder line with the Rangoon regime. And Burma can be singled out for punishment without affecting the argument about China, contended Mike Jendrzejczyk, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch/Asia.

"In China, at least there's some possibility that over the long term, if economic engagement is accompanied by sustained political pressure, then economic reform could lead to political reform," Jendrzejczyk said. "In Burma, I don't think you can make that case with any credibility. You have a military government that controls the economy and uses economic investment to keep itself in power."

But Unocal Corp., a Los Angeles-based oil company that is one of the few U.S. firms with a sizable stake in Burma, argues that a dangerous precedent may be set. Officials of the company deride suggestions that a prohibition on U.S. business dealings would help the cause of human rights there; they point out that the United States accounts for just 3 percent of Burma's trade and 8 percent of its foreign investments.

Imposing sanctions on Burma, said Jack Rafuse, manager of Unocal's Washington office, would be no more effective than "stamping your foot and turning your back."

Koreas Across the Great Divide

Many in the South fear the cost of helping the impoverished North, writes **Mary Jordan** in Seoul

WITH Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 playing in the background, Chon Jin Sook sat with her friends in the Terazzo Cafe in the city's ritziest shopping district and admitted that one of the last things she ever wants to see is a unified Korea.

The 50-year-old flutist, who wore red Ferragamo shoes and a rock-sized diamond on her middle finger, fretted about the chaos and cost of uniting her prosperous nation with North Korea, one of the world's most impoverished. "Things are very good here. I don't want chaos," she said. "I like the way things are now."

Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, cleaved by ideology and barbed wire since the end of World War II, is the official goal of the South Korean government. But for many South Koreans who have grown accustomed to a First World standard of living, the idea of reuniting with their Third World siblings is far more attractive as a wish than a reality.

The prospect of a united Korea is growing here, along with increasingly urgent reports of the North's economic meltdown. And as the prospect does grow, more South Koreans are worried that their own lives may soon change for the worse, that the high times that have accompanied their "economic miracle" could dissolve into hard times.

Acutely aware of the pains, and the price, of German unification — from the unpopular 7.5 percent income tax surcharge west Germans had to pay to that unified country's unemployment and social problems — many South Koreans echo the complaint of the woman at the Terazzo Cafe: Who needs it?

"Only recently have we learned how bad things are inside North Korea," said Chung Moon Sook, 49, as she shared afternoon tea with Chon. "When we were in the dark, I was all for the idea of unification. But now I am worried not just about the financial problems, but the pollution up there, the nuclear waste, the uncertainty of what other problems are involved."

The most daunting task facing the Seoul government is the anticipated eventual fusion of two completely different nations, and reluctance on its citizens' part will only add to the burden. Protests, strikes and turmoil over unification would be a government nightmare.

"Building a consensus for the sacrifice that unity will bring will be a hard job," one government official said. "A very hard job."

Ho Yang Kang, spokesman for the National Unification Ministry, said that while most South Koreans share the "firm basic philosophy that we must be united, there are many different ideas about how and when."

Along Seoul's conspicuously wealthy Rodeo Drive, named after the famous shopping street in Beverly Hills, it is difficult to imagine comrades from the North strolling past the shops of Armani, Gucci and Dior. Here, hip South Koreans drive sports cars to expensive nightclubs, and fine restaurants serve heaping portions of filet mignon and Korean barbecue.

Thirty miles away in North Korea, international aid workers say, people are on the verge of starvation, hospitals and homes have no heat, and factories are shut for lack of fuel. Few people have telephones, a black-and-white one-channel television is a luxury and the leaving of one's village, let alone the country, is forbidden by law. North Koreans all wear the same style shirt or scarf because that is all the lone state-run factory produces.

The phenomenal differences between the two societies are what scare most South Koreans. "They think their leader is God; we throw ours in jail," said Park Kum Soo, a Seoul office clerk, referring to two former presidents here recently convicted of corruption and treason.

Nicholas Eberstadt, a Korea specialist at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, said that while there are many differences between the German and Korean experiences, Germany provides a useful benchmark.

North Korea is far more impoverished than East Germany was, he said, but he is not convinced the costs of unity would be higher here. Much of the $700 billion Bonn has spent on reunification went to bestowing on eastern Germany the unemployment insurance and other social welfare benefits of the west, but South Korea has no such welfare system.

In other ways, unity could be tougher. As Eberstadt said, "Forgiveness and reconciliation will be hard" because the North and South "fought a blood war with each other and almost every family lost somebody to the other side."

Chon, whose husband makes a good living in the thriving semiconductor business here, said she worries that after a half-century of "being brainwashed" into thinking that socialism and collectivization are the righteous way, North Koreans will not be able to adapt to her world of private property and individual enterprise.

Koreans from both sides of the peninsula speak the same language and share a history and customs. An estimated one-quarter of South Koreans have relatives in the North. Although the half-century divide is just a heartbeat in the peninsula's long history, significant differences have evolved in how the two societies function.

The South Korean government is being accused of failing to plan adequately for the problems that are sure to accompany a sudden collapse of the North. Critics argue that Seoul is not devoting enough funds for such plans and is unwisely pinning its hopes on a gradual drawing together of the two countries.

The 520-member Unification Ministry, which has been charged since 1969 with planning policies for reunification, insists it has many plans for the various scenarios that could end the divide. But the issue is so sensitive that no government official would speak about it on the record. North Korea considers any discussion of unification plans an insult, they said.

Despite the general fear of reunification among South Koreans, some here say they have a responsibility to tackle the problem themselves, rather than leaving the burden to future generations.

"If I don't go through this ordeal," said Kim Jae Soon, 49, sipping coffee and eating cake in the Terazzo Cafe, "it will be my children or grandchildren."



Seoul food . . . while South Koreans enjoy a high standard of living, in the North people are on the verge of starvation

Little in common

SOUTH KOREA	NORTH KOREA
Population 43.5 million	**Population** 23.9 million
Area 38,375 square miles	**Area** 47,399 square miles
Urban 74%	**Urban** 61%
GDP 1994 $508 billion	**GDP** 1994 $21.3 billion
Imports 1993 $78.9 billion	**Imports** 1993 $1.6 billion
Exports 1993 $81 billion	**Exports** 1993 $1.0 billion
Televisions 1 per 4.3 persons	**Televisions** 1 per 11.5 persons
Telephones 1 per 2.6 persons	**Telephones** 1 per 21 persons
Life expectancy at birth 1996	**Life expectancy at birth** 1996
Males 70	Males 67
Females 77	Females 74
Infant mortality rate 8 per 1,000 live births	**Infant mortality rate** 26 per 1,000 live births

New York Funnels Cash to Drug Cartels

Pierre Thomas

THREE or four times a day, some of Charlie Patel's best customers would wander into his cramped convenience store at 84-21 37th Avenue in the borough of *Queens in New York City and* methodically fill out the wire-transfer forms Western Union requires for shipping money overseas.

"They keep coming back, they keep coming back all day long," Patel said. He long suspected the men were working for drug cartels.

He was right.

Federal authorities have identified 12 businesses in the New York area that were used to wire more than $1.2 billion a year to South America, including hundreds of millions of dollars in illegal drug proceeds destined for Colombian cartels. The companies are affiliated with businesses ranging from beeper sales outlets to travel agencies to mom-and-pop convenience stores such as Patel's, officials said.

The discovery has provided another startling indicator of the mammoth scale of the nation's illicit drug market and revealed how the largely unregulated money-transfer industry has emerged as a new and important conduit for funneling cash to international drug cartels, law *enforcement officials say.*

"This was a primary means of the Cali cartel getting their money out of New York," said Raymond Kelly, undersecretary for enforcement at the the Treasury Department. "It's mind-boggling, the number of people who are involved."

Federal investigators determined that the 12 wire-transfer companies employed 1,600 agents who in one year alone transferred an estimated $800 million to Colombia, about $300 million of which is suspected to be drug money. Treasury Department officials have since imposed emergency restrictions on the 12 wire-transfer companies, requiring them to document certain transactions bound for Colombia.

"We have identified a significant gap in our nation's money-laundering regulatory system," said Stan Morris, director of the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCen).

Wire-transfer companies provide a valuable service in lower-income and immigrant communities, which *often do not have access to banks or* more traditional financial institutions, Morris said. But as authorities have stepped up efforts to combat money laundering through banks, drug cartels have increasingly turned to less-regulated services such as the wire-transfer companies to avoid detection, he said.

Concerned about the implications of the investigation's findings, congressional leaders held a hearing last week to discuss its ramifications and determine whether new guidelines are needed to better regulate the wire-transfer industry.

The 12 targeted companies, which have not been publicly identified, provide service to the roughly 25,500 Colombian immigrant households in the New York City area, officials said. Prosecutors and investigators have dubbed Roosevelt Avenue in the Jackson Heights section of Queens "ground zero" for such transactions to Colombia, with literally hundreds of stores offering such services. Some of the companies were unwitting participants in the drug trade, while others were directly involved, the officials said.

Rogue transfer agents have been convicted of transmitting hundreds of thousands of dollars in illegal proceeds to the cities of Cali, Medellin, and Bogota, said Bonnie Klapper, an assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York. The cash was delivered to storefronts by a drug-money "mules," whose job was simply to wire the currency.

It soon became clear that the amounts of money transferred was far more than the Colombian community, whose median income is about $27,000, could support, Klapper said.

The findings grew out of the work done by a federal, state and local task force dubbed "The El Dorado," which was set up in 1992 to combat money laundering in the New York City area.

Based on evidence developed by the El Dorado task force and FinCen, Kelly last August issued what is known as a Geographic Targeting Order against the 12 money-transfer companies. The order, issued under the federal Bank Secrecy Act, required the companies to report all transfers to Colombia of $750 or more in currency. *Before the order*, only transactions over $10,000 had to be reported under federal law.

After the new federal guidelines were imposed, federal authorities noticed some immediate changes. Three of the unidentified remittance companies stopped sending funds to Colombia, and the other nine saw dramatic reductions in the amount of funds transferred.

In addition, currency seizures along the Eastern Seaboard began to increase dramatically. From August through November 1 of last year, law enforcement officials seized $25 million in the region, compared with $7 million during the same time frame the previous year. Total seizures since the order was placed in effect are now up to $50 million.

Including the Kitchen Sink

Liesl Schillinger

ABBREVIATING ERNIE
By Peter Lefcourt
Villard. 301pp. $24

PETER LEFCOURT'S new novel, Abbreviating Ernie, is an acid-etched caricature of an America that soaks in a sitz bath muddied by home shopping, televised show trials, and Prozac. The book's sordid main subject is the fall of a degraded and dull middle-aged couple named Audrey and Ernest Haas. Audrey is a larval creature, sluggish, mopey, weepy and unemployed, who uses sadsack TV movies of the week like an IV and who contemplates leaving the house only when her Tupperware collection needs replenishing. (To call her maggot-like insults the energetic purposefulness of that busy grub, which does at least eventually turn into a developed creature with compound eyes and wings.) Ernest, it is enough to say, is a urologist.

Carl Furillo, Lefcourt's stock hack tabloid-journalist character (picture Jeff Goldblum in The Big Chill), describes the Haases as "a quiet couple living in a green-and-white Dutch Colonial house on a quiet street in middle America who, nevertheless, enjoyed cross-dressing and bondage in their knotty-pine kitchen." It is during one of these episodes of stoveside S&M that something goes wrong — or rather, more wrong. Mrs. Haas, who has been playfully handcuffed to her stove, suddenly finds that her husband has become immobile while they're going at it and that she is trapped, unable to reach the keys to the cuffs, all alone except for the droning company of the Home Shopping Channel on the kitchen TV. Ever-suggestible, increasingly hysterical, Audrey sees a carving knife come up on the screen and promptly remembers her own tele-ordered knife, plugs it in, and cuts off her husband's penis to detach him from her. Immediately afterwards, a deaf, six-foot-five Native American burglar named Emmanuel Longhouse breaks in, just in time to feed Audrey lasagna and depart from the scene with the weapon. Ernest Haas is dead; whether he died before or after his wife's impromptu surgery is hard to say, and Audrey, practically brain-dead in any case, is of no help in unravelling the mystery. And so Lefcourt rounds up the usual suspects, familiar to anyone who's ever seen or heard of Columbo, Watergate, or O.J. — the grubby, loveable cop, the wily male reporter, the pushy female reporter, the secret mistress, the ball-breaking female lawyer, the acerbic judge — and invites them in to feast on the carrion of his plot. It's Babbitt meets Bobbitt.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY RUSSO

Lefcourt, who has logged years of experience as a crack television writer and scriptwriter, clearly got wind of H.L. Mencken's adage early — that no one will ever go broke underestimating the intelligence or taste of the American people — and installed it on his mental screen saver. He is too smart for Abbreviating Ernie to be a bad book — far from it. It is as difficult to pull your eyes away from these compromised pages as it is not to look at an accident on the highway — this even though the author hurls one character or plot element after another out the door as he speeds along and finally, with one great heave, the whole plot itself, which is sacrificed in favor of the more engrossing project of getting Furillo laid.

It is a hateful book, however, cynically and venomously composed 'twixt sleep and television. You get the feeling that the author never met a stereotype he didn't like or a woman that he did — unless that woman was a hot babe, preferably Asian, who knew how to dress, and whose greatest wish was to be undressed.

As for stereotypes: The judge gets to wear black, but doesn't get away scot-free; she is compared to Ethel Merman and magicked into a crypto-lesbian. A Haitian appears briefly in order to become the cabbie who steals the tabloid hack character Furillo's ex-girlfriend. The Native American deaf burglar can barely spell and repeatedly calls Ernest Haas's severed organ a "tomahawk" (to reporter Furillo, an Italian, it is a "salami," but sadly a Polish barman named Kratowski doesn't stick around long enough to call it a "kielbasa").

There is not much more to say about this book, a problem Lefcourt seemed to grapple with early on, since he spends page after page having different characters rehash and repeat the plot, permitting endless opportunities for gags and penile euphemisms.

And yet, ironically, at the end of a 250-page deliberation, the reader learns absolutely nothing more about the bloody little drama that was plopped down in the first 12 pages other than that Lefcourt and his characters would like the story to make it to the movies.

They'll probably get their wish, just as Audrey gets hers — to serve as a pointer girl on the Weather Channel, even though, as the hard-boiled blonde lawyer who sneaks in briefly points out, "I don't know about you, but it sounds like a big yawn to me." Because, as Lefcourt knows so well, the reading and viewing public don't care if a story holds together, as long as the people who enact it look good cuffed to a stove.

Unsentimental Journey

Reginald McKnight

OUT OF AMERICA: A Black Man Confronts Africa
By Keith B. Richburg
Basic. 257pp. $24

KEITH B. RICHBURG writes Out Of America as if he knows he's in for it. And he probably is, for Richburg, a black journalist who served three years (1991-94) as The Washington Post's bureau chief in Africa, describes the continent as little more than "a place where the best and brightest minds languish in dark prison cells. Where a ruthless warlord aims mortar shells into a crowded market place, and where teenagers strip down cars and fit them with antiaircraft guns to roam the streets terrorizing and looting. Where a dictator begs the international community for food aid to avert mass hunger even as he erects a new international airport in his poor hometown . . . a place where the poets are hanged by the soldiers." "I have looked in my crystal ball," he says, "and tried to see some slivers of light . . . But all I can see is darkness," and he therefore concludes, "Thank God my nameless ancestor, brought across the ocean in chains and leg irons, made it out alive . . . Thank God I am an American."

Those six words may be among the most difficult for many black Americans to utter without at least a shade of misgiving, and Richburg is no exception. "Being black in America," he says, "you walk around constantly aware of your difference, defined by the color of your skin." He understands the African-American "sense of alienation," the sense that black people often "feel like a permanent and unwanted minority in the country of their birth."

At times, Richburg seems almost aggrieved over his patriotism, as well as his rejection of Afrocentrism. "There is a sense," he writes, "rightly or wrongly, that a measure of our esteem as a black race in America is somehow tied to the success or failure of independent black governments running their own shows in Africa." Yet later he adds, "the reaffirmation of some kind of lost African identity is rooted more in fantasy than reality," and black Americans would be better off putting "their energies into making America work better, into realizing the dream of a multiracial society, than in clinging to the myth that we belong anyplace else." And he calls upon all black people to "start admitting that the enemy is within."

To help the reader get to the root of his ideological inclinations, Richburg recounts some of the more salient details of his life. Though he was born and raised in the Detroit of the '60s, and therefore influenced by the sociopolitical vicissitudes of those days, his early childhood neighborhood was integrated; he attended integrated schools, and many of his friends were white. Whenever trouble arose between blacks and whites he felt himself to be "on both sides, on neither side — not wanting to have to take sides." We gather that, prior to his life in Africa, he felt relatively cool toward Afrocentrism, fairly unsure of the depth of his own blackness, and only intellectually interested in Africa itself.

After college, as a staff reporter for The Post, he took a month-long vacation through much of Europe and Northern Africa. While en route between France and Spain, a West African co-traveler asked him whether he'd been to "black Africa." He answered that he hadn't had the time, but inwardly he admitted to himself that though he "must someday go," he "also knew . . . that the thought of Africa filled me with dread . . . Partially, it was the fear that I would not like it, that I would find the poverty . . . too depressing," and that "perhaps Africa would reject me. Perhaps Africa would force me" to choose sides. And later he adds, oddly, "I was uncertain what it would be like . . . for once not standing out in a crowd."

It's this last remark that makes this exceedingly compelling narrative rather emotionally opaque. For while it's hard to help growing increasingly pained and alarmed as Richburg's powerful, heartfelt prose take us from the disintegration of Somalia, to the literally wholesale butchery in Rwanda, to the AIDS-riddled streets of Nairobi, to the bizarre brutality of the Liberian civil war, one continually glimpses something out the corner of the eye that averts one's gaze from the heart of darkness to the blurry heart of the messenger. It would seem that Richburg's ambivalence and "racial" insecurities quite nearly disqualify him as the reliable eye, ear, voice and mind for this narrative.

Richburg's personal agonies seem almost beside the point, given the massive horror he describes

We first notice this ambivalence when he talks about life in Asia (where he is now bureau chief for The Post, in Hong Kong). In the Philippines, he writes, "you can walk to the front of the line at an airline counter. Doors are held open for you. You can't convince a cop to give you a ticket, even if he catches you speeding through a red light without your license." In Asia, in short, his color difference is an advantage.

But in Kenya, a black American admits to him that "I'd rather be black in South Africa under apartheid than go through what I'm going through here." Richburg responds, "Sadly, I knew exactly what she meant," and he relates several of the indignities he has experienced being mistaken for an indigenous African. One begins to suspect that Richburg prefers the kind of specialness conferred upon relatively privileged minorities, that he wants to be defined by the color of his skin. But this ambivalence sharpens into real dissonance when Richburg relates the story of three of his colleagues (two white, one Kenyan) who are murdered while covering a mass-killing in Somalia.

He laments their deaths, but concludes that, given the place, the people and the times, probably little could have been done to prevent the tragedy. Such is the unpleasant lot of journalists covering war. But later, when he himself seems on the brink of death (having been mistaken for a Somali), he concludes: "Being black in Africa. I felt tears welling up in my eyes . . . It dawned on me then how close I came to being *just another statistic*. All because I was a black man in the wrong place; a black man in Africa" (emphasis mine). Later, he commiserates with a black American refugee affairs officer in Rwanda, who bitterly confesses to him that being black in Africa is "an absolute disadvantage," after her hair-raising encounter with a Rwandan patrol. But later, when Richburg hears of the death of his good friend and colleague Ilaria, an Italian television reporter, he cries for her "and for everyone else who had died senselessly on this senseless continent," but without any speculation as to how her color may or may not have been a factor in her death.

And so it seems that he is altogether willing to attribute the deaths of his three white colleagues — as for the Kenyan, who knows? — to the random vagaries of war, but attributes his own near-death, and the near-death of the refugee affairs officer, to their being blacks in Africa. "War's first horror," says Scott Anderson in a recently published essay in Harper's magazine, "is not that people die for perverse reasons, for a cause, but that they die for no discernible reason at all . . . none of it is knowable — nothing is revealed as foolish or wrong or naive — until it is too late." Yet here is Richburg, an international journalist doing what international journalists invariably do, chasing famine, disease, insurrections and especially wars, and seemingly forgetting, now and then, what veteran soldiers and seasoned journalists know: War doesn't care. And so it appears that he may be merely using certain narrative moments to buttress an argument he suspects is fundamentally weak.

The irony is that it probably isn't so weak, for surely we live in a time when being black and American is not the easy oxymoron it once was. But while there are abundant dangers in romanticizing one's motherland, fatherland, or some gone-by era, dismissing Afrocentrism *without adequately taking into account* the exigencies that prompted it insults its adherents while giving short shrift to centuries of history. Besides, Afrocentrism and black American patriotism are not mutually exclusive.

Finally, and most important, his mourning the death of a continent that still teems with 400 million people — although troubled they may be — seems, at best, premature. Richburg's personal agonies and predilections seem almost beside the point, respecting the massive horror he describes. Let us hope that his book moves both those who would condemn him and those who would embrace him to peer through the haze of his personal convictions and note that Africa is in hell and must somehow be saved.

New guidelines are bringing the thorny issue of intellectual property theft into the open. **Peter Kingston** assesses the extent of the problem

Daylight robbery

THE VILLAIN in the most recent short story by Sir Henry Harris, the eminent former Oxford Regius Professor of Medicine, is loathsome Basil, a neurophysiologist who habitually filches colleagues' ideas.

His magnum outrage, which made him world famous, was putting his name top of the authors' list on an article launching a major discovery in genetics — not even his specialist field. According to scientific convention, that meant the innovation was chiefly his.

But the discovery was really by Leonid, an obscure Soviet scientist, who had managed to get an exeat to the West. His name came second on the article and he won none of the recognition he deserved. Leonid later killed himself.

Basil, Sir Henry insists, is a fictional character but "the theme is not fictional". Things have changed since the late 1950s when the young Dr Harris asked his DPhil supervisor, the penicillin pioneer Howard Florey, to add his name to an article he had written. "I don't put my name on papers to which I haven't made a material contribution," the great man snapped.

Such scruples are no longer universal, says Sir Henry. "There are some labs around the world and in this country where the head of department is such a dominant figure that he puts his name on everything that goes out of his lab, whether he has contributed to it or not."

One of the reasons this abuse can happen is universities' unwillingness to get involved in authorship disputes. Now, in a new Code of Research Practice, Edinburgh university is pioneering an approach that it hopes will deter such abuse by department heads. The other Scottish higher education institutions have followed Edinburgh's example by publishing a joint research policy framework from which each can draw up their own codes.

Although Edinburgh's code provides only voluntary guidelines on authorship issues, it is applauded as a significant step forward by the Association of University Teachers, which says that Scottish institutions are way ahead of their English counterparts. The AUT is also preparing its own code of conduct on intellectual property rights and authorship, which is due to be completed in the spring.

The true extent of what amounts in the worst cases to intellectual property theft in higher education is impossible to gauge, mainly because the victims are commonly the most vulnerable people in the research world. There are 28,000 contract research staff in UK universities. An unknown number of them get insufficient credit — sometimes no credit at all — for doing the bulk of the work for published pieces of work. The plaudits go instead to more senior academics, often the "fund-holders" who have won the cash grants to finance the projects but in some cases have had nothing else to do with the work.

The abuse is serious because authorship on published research papers is the hard currency of the academic world and vital to an individual's career progress, explained Colin Bryson of St Andrew's university, who is researching fixed-term contracts in higher education, and chairs the AUT's national fixed-term non-contract research committee. "Authors' names go at the beginning and papers are usually remembered by the authors' names," he said. In cases of joint authorship, they are often remembered by the first name on the list. Five people might be named on a journal article but in footnote, and other citations forever more it will be recorded as Bloggs *et al.*

In the small print at the end of papers can be found lists of names typically introduced by the words: "I (we) would like to acknowledge the following . . ."

"Acknowledgments count for nothing in the academic world when it comes to writing CVs and applying for academic jobs," said Mr Bryson. "It can be quite easy for young researchers to be persuaded by their seniors to take a place in the acknowledgments because it is too great an honour at their stage of career to be included in the authors." Sometimes the victims don't realise what is going on. They have often moved to a fresh post when the results of their previous research are published without their names on it. Often they know precisely what is happening but accept it as part of the arduous process towards academic careers.

Sometimes, says Mr Bryson, senior members of their department persuade them to give up their due place on the authors' list. "I've talked to a number of people who have been subtly talked out of authorship in order to get their contracts renewed, and in some cases their contracts weren't renewed in the end."

The chief reason the true extent of the abuse remains unknown is that its victims are too scared for their current positions or future careers to blow the whistle, according to the AUT. They rely so heavily on department heads and superiors for renewals of their contracts, or for good references when seeking work elsewhere, that they endure in silence.

IT IS reasonable to assume that the Research Assessment Exercise has boosted the incidence of abuse in recent years. It has increased pressure on research teams to hold on to data which departing staff have gathered. And it has pushed permanent members in university departments to claim authorship on research carried out by temporary contract staff because RAE rules mean that multi-authored research papers can be submitted only once, according to Nathalie Fenton, an AUT official and social sciences lecturer at Loughborough university. "Sometimes it's felt better to knock a name or two off a paper, and it's usually the contract researchers who lose out."

She recalled a recent dispute where a university department was refusing to allow a departing researcher to take his work away when his contract finished.

Victims' anguish is not simply about loss of credit, she said. In the worst cases, findings are altered by the people writing up a project paper after the key researcher — "the person who was drenched in the empirical detail" — has left the department.

Occasionally wronged researchers do make a stand. There are two cases currently running in Scottish universities, said Mr Bryson. Because universities invariably "wash their hands of the matter" and plead that the parties concerned must sort it out, they are lengthy procedures.

The AUT tries to persuade the parties to accept the adjudication of a legally qualified external arbitrator but this is usually resisted by the person(s) complained of, he said. In one of the Scottish cases the complainant is now determined to go to law, said Mr Bryson. This could prove a useful test case, according to Hector MacQueen, Professor of Private Law at Edinburgh University.

But litigation does not address what a lay person might think to be the most blatant wrong — the theft of ideas and data.

"There is no copyright in ideas and information, only in the form of expression," Professor MacQueen explained. To make a breach of copyright stick, a plaintiff would have to show that a disputed article or paper contained substantial chunks which were very similar to what he or she had already written down. A plaintiff could also claim the right to be identified as an author of a work provided he or she had contributed to the writing up of the published material.

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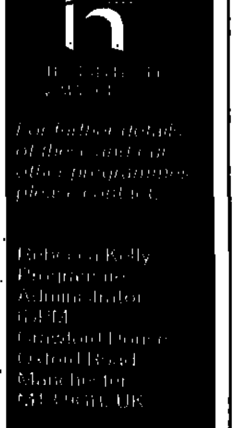
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Rivers of money, rivers of tears

The billion-dollar business of building dams hides an even greater human cost, writes **Jan Rocha**



AN INTERNAL World Bank document leaked this month to the Guardian analyses the problems of the many large dams that it has financed. The paper notes Guatemala's massive Chixoy dam and comments that resettlement of about 2,500 Mayan Indians was "mismanaged".

This "bankspeak" hides a human and ecological tragedy. According to Patrick McCully, author of a new book about dams*, the "mismanagement" involved 369 Mayan Indians — mainly women and children — being tortured, shot, stabbed, garrotted and bludgeoned to death by the Guatemalan military in punishment for their community demanding they be properly compensated for the loss of their homes to the dam.

Dam building is now a $20 billion-a-year global business that, at its best, brings irrigation, electricity and "progress" to developing countries, but consistently involves the destitution of communities, social upheaval, even the death of many people affected.

Since 1950, there have been 35,000 large dams built. But the human cost has been huge: new estimates by McCully and others suggest that 60 million people have been forced to leave their flooded homes because of them.

Usually, the consequences of what the World Bank euphemistically calls "involuntary resettlement" are less direct than at the Chixoy dam. Hunger, disease, homelessness and unemployment are all common to communities forced to make way for dams.

Likewise, the corruption, graft, and mismanagement which have escalated the costs of almost all large dams are sanitised into the term "cost overrun".

Besides the effect on people, large dams cause huge environmental impact because of changes in water quality, river patterns and the reduction of biodiversity.

The World Bank, which has financed more than 600 dams or major dam-related "facilities" such as massive irrigation schemes, acknowledges that they are controversial and is yet again considering withdrawing support from large dams altogether.

The leaked bank document makes the case against dam-building. It says: "In the 1960s, cost/benefit analysis became accepted as the standard criterion for the justification of large dams. In the 1970s and 1980s, social and environmental impacts, previously treated as inevitable side-effects, emerged as a fundamental concern."

Brazil is one of the most prolific dam-building nations. Under the national energy plan, 500 new dams are projected in the next 25 years. Right now, a 1,784 sq km lake is filling up behind the 150-metre high wall of the latest giant hydro-electric dam, Serra da Mesa, in central Brazil. Fifty-four billion cubic metres of water will supply 5,700 GWh (gigawatt hours) of energy to meet the growing demand of the Brazilian market. The waters will cover up 93 important archaeological sites, part of an indigenous reserve, and drown thousands of animals, but will affect very few people directly.

THE same cannot be said for the Itaipu dam, on the Brazil-Paraguay border: 42,000 people were affected, many being dumped in resettlement projects thousands of kilometres away. They are still fighting the energy company to get better, more rapid compensation, local resettlement and a right to administer funds allocated for the victims.

Numerous self-help groups are forming to combat their effects. The 4,000 families of small farmers who lost their homes and land to the Ita dam in Rio Grande do Sul in 1987 won the right to build their new houses through *mutirao*, a system of communal self-help traditionally used by poor populations in Brazil. The result was bigger buildings with better quality material at half the cost the company had paid contractors in other projects.

These local organisations came together in 1991 to form a national organisation, MAB (the movement of people affected by dams). Last week, MAB hosted the first international conference of organisations of dam-affected populations, with representatives from more than 20 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, as well as the American and European River Networks swapping their experiences in fighting the dams, demanding a say in decision-making, and achieving recognition of the rights of indigenous and peasant communities.

For McCully, a former co-editor of the Ecologist Magazine, a few multinational engineering, equipment, manufacture and construction corporations make up "a dam-building mafia". He says: "The huge amount of money at stake has encouraged these companies and their national and international industry groups — such as the International Commission on Large Dams and the US National Hydro Power Association — to constitute an active pro-dam lobby."

He claims that methods used range from straightforward public relations to bribery. "The construction industry was at the centre of a stream of scandals in the early 1990s concerning illicit payments to politicians in return for contracts — most notably in Japan, Thailand, Korea, Brazil, Italy, Spain, France and Portugal."

Hydro-corruption, he says, explains why dam costs often escalate astronomically. The Itaipu dam rocketed from under $4 billion to nearly $20 billion. Yacyreta, a joint Argentine Paraguayan dam on the Parana River, went from $2.7 billion to $11.5 billion. But the displaced population is still waiting for promised compensation.

ELECTRICITY-INTENSIVE industries, such as aluminium smelting, also support the dam industry. For them, hydropower is cheap because it is usually subsidised. Low-interest loans from development banks and aid agencies were readily available, McCully believes, because "during the cold war . . . the superpowers wanted visible signs of the dependence of their client states and advertisements for the technological wonders which followed in the wake of capitalism and communism". Today, commercial interests predominate, with governments in the North funding overseas projects to keep their otherwise idle construction and engineering companies in business.

McCully, like other critics, raises the question of alternatives — and concludes that there are many. They include upgrading existing dams, irrigation schemes and water systems to make them more efficient (installing efficient showerheads in 80 per cent of US bathrooms would reduce water use by nearly 3,000 million litres a day and save an amount of electricity equal to the output of three large power plants.) Conservation and a return to traditional systems of water use in farming communities as well as new technologies such as solar and wind power, also have a place.

*Silenced Rivers by Patrick McCully is published by Zed Books at £14.95



CLASSIFIED

CAR HIRE

Yesterday seems so far away

THE last time he visited the Queen, he went with three mates and joked of smoking cannabis in the loos. This time Sir Paul McCartney took three of his children and said: "My mum and dad would have been extremely proud," *writes Alex Bellos.*

Scenes outside Buckingham Palace last week were — almost — reminiscent of 1965 when the Beatles collected their MBEs. Screaming teenage girls were among the hundreds of fans, some of whom had waited since 6am to see Macca upgrade his honour to Sir Paul.

"This brings back memories of 1965 — it seems strange being here without the other three. I keep looking over my shoulder for them," he said.

He joked with reporters that the former Beatles George Harrison and Ringo Starr tease him about his honour. "They call me Your Holiness," he said.

Sir Paul added that he never dreamt, back in the days of playing at Liverpool's Cavern Club, he would receive a knighthood at Buckingham Palace.

"It would have been seen as a joke," he said. "It's fantastic. This is one of the best days of my life."



Sir Paul at the Palace last week: 'One of the best days of my life', and, above, in 1965 ADAM BUTLER

Letter from Sikasso Robert Lacville

Listening to the voice of Aids

AIDS CAME creeping into Mali across the southern borders. It came in the big trucks which bring imported goods up from the coastal ports of Abidjan and Lomé, and even Conakry. Truckers are wealthy and voracious. While they negotiate their customs fees the drivers set up camp beneath their monster-trucks and take on temporary wives for a week. In the early nineties a survey found 30 per cent of Sikasso's prostitutes tested HIV positive. Campaigns were started to distribute information and condoms, and battles fought with the Ministry of Health and the pharmacists who wanted to keep condoms "medical". The aim was to try to get a condom into every hotel bedroom in Mali.

In those days 27 per cent of Abidjan's population was HIV positive, as was 7 per cent of the rural population. Côte d'Ivoire was reeling but Mali had only had a few cases. Most people knew somebody whose friend had a friend . . .

Things have changed in five years. Now everybody has lost somebody. At the end of 1997 we buried Issa.

What a waste! Issa may have been a tiresome husband and an irregular finance manager (to put it kindly), but he was a good well-digger and a wonderful musician. Issa played the ngoni, the traditional three-stringed guitar of the Manding diaspora. He was backed by drummers and fronted by a break-dancer, an elegant athlete and tumbler whose final act involved spinning on his chest on broken glass. But it was really Issa's songs, his words and their delivery which made him locally famous. We had promised to bring him on to the national stage, where his messages of morality would achieve a wider audience.

ISSA HAD an impact on everybody but himself. His song against smoking was a humorous self-parody: "Issa, you know that cigarettes are bad for you, so why do you keep on smoking?" He sang about marriage, yet he was a terrible husband — as long as I knew him he had four wives, divorcing at least one each year . . . We were doing an anti-Aids project together, using practical research-action. He had a couple of songs which were hummed in all the streets and markets of the southern Sikasso region, where he and his troupe gave concerts.

"Aids is our enemy. Aids makes widows and poverty . . . Aids makes orphans and unhappiness . . ." The idea was to measure Aids awareness, by carrying out a simple survey three days before a concert, and then three days afterwards and again three months afterwards, to see whether messages stuck with the melodies.

I visited Save the Children's community development programme along the Ivoirian borders, where Issa dug the wells. Villages have health committees, keeping the wells clean and disinfecting them every six months. In each community there are women, now literate in the Bambara language, who track births and deaths and cause of deaths. The charity lost three members of staff to Aids during 1996.

The director was distraught. "For three years we have delivered a condom to every staff member inside every monthly wage-packet. What more can you do? These guys preach preventive health all day to the villagers, but they do not listen to their own voices."

Issa was one of them. Villagers all around Sikasso, Bougouni, Kolondieba listened to his voice and hummed his songs about Aids. Issa wanted to prove that the nationwide distribution of his music would be a good investment in the fight against Aids.

But now he'll never be able to.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

WHAT are the three greatest conspiracies of all time?

AS FAR as Britain is concerned: privatisation; share options; and remuneration committees. — *Len Feltham, Keynsham, Bristol*

THE Oxford dictionary defines conspiracy as a "combination of people for an unlawful or immoral purpose". Three candidates:
1) The slave trade. Since it continued for some two-and-a-half centuries, this is also the longest conspiracy in history. The British were probably the worst offenders.
2) The Holocaust. The fact that this was, indeed, a broadly-based German conspiracy is only now being revealed.
3) The rape of Zaire. The process was started by the Belgians, with great brutality, in the late 19th century. Since independence it has been continued by President Mobutu's clique, with the support of Western commercial and political interests. One of Africa's richest countries is now bankrupt. — *Martin Ballard, Cambridge*

RELIGION, masonry, and Manchester United. — *George Bigby, Tarporley, Cheshire*

HOW creative were our forebears in celebrating the first millennium?

IN SUPPORT of Dr France's view that little notice was taken of the first millennium (March 9) is the fact that few people would have thought of the year in terms of counting from the birth of Christ. The system, invented by Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century, was used by Bede in the eighth, gradually adopted over the next three centuries and only in the 1050s used consistently by the papacy. — *Professor Eric Fernie, Courtauld Institute of Art, London*

THE Icelandic parliament, chose the first millennium to make a peaceful conversion from paganism to Christianity. Perhaps we could use the second millennium to reverse this disastrous error. — *Duncan Smart, Prague, Czech Republic*

DO powerful lights outside houses deter burglars or merely help them to operate more efficiently?

ONE thing security lights will do is protect you from a law suit when the burglar trips over the children's bicycles in the dark. — *Angie Sutton, San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico*

WHAT happens to the caffeine from decaffeinated coffee?

YEARS ago when I worked for Maxwell House Coffee the extracted caffeine was sold to Coca-Cola. The remaining product was called Sanka and sold at a premium. — *Arthur Cordell, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*

ARE there names that I am not allowed to use if I want to change my name by deed poll?

THE criteria of which names are considered acceptable vary from country to country. A Swiss woman had problems recently when she tried to name her daughter Lexicon, with the authorities deeming the name "improper". In Switzerland there are quite specific guidelines on the matter based on precedence, but with a ban on the names of "indisputably notorious" characters of the past. Thus Mercedes, a common Spanish name, would be admissible, whereas Volkswagen, Rambo and Coca-Cola would not. If you wanted, for reasons of your own, to call your baby Stalin it would get the thumbs down, but Lenin (an Italian name) would be allowed. In the latter case, however, you would be encouraged to attend a "counselling session", in which you would presumably be briefed on the life of Vladimir Ilyich and invited to reconsider. — *Her Majesty Kween Elisabeth Zwo, Zurich, Switzerland*

ON MY computer I can discard old files to make memory available for new data. Is there any way in which I can re-use my brain cells?

THE brain's vast store of information is not accessed by address like a computer but by associations, as Dirk Grutzmacher pointed out (March 2).

Computers can, however, be made to mimic an associative memory using a complex pattern of linked lists. But this can cause the loss of some information, while still taking up memory space. So it is usual for computers to scan these lists from time to time and remove those that are out of date or those that have no connections.

Freud noted some of these characteristics in dreams — irrational linking of ideas, inconsequential passage from one memory to another, and the remarkable way in which vividly remembered dreams are quickly forgotten. Perhaps we are forcing associations in order to explore the past day's memories and mostly delete them. These ideas came from the late Chris Evans and Ted Newman while at the National Physical Laboratory (New Scientist, November 1964). — *Donald Davies, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex*

Any answers?

IN AMERICAN crime movies, Italians are called either "guineas" or "ginnys". What's the origin of this derogatory term? — *Robert Caldicott, Eccles, Manchester*

MY MOTHER died a few days ago at 103 years. Her earliest memory was of 1899, watching Queen Victoria passing by in a carriage. Is there now anyone left alive who can claim to have seen Queen Victoria? — *John Cox, Teddington, Middlesex*

WHO determined that we'd have two days off at the weekend? — *Cynthia Powell, Hull, North Humberside*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. Readers with access to the Internet can respond to Notes & Queries via http://nq.guardian.co.uk

Playing God with people's lives

Leilani Muir was just 11 years old when she was told to have her appendix out. What she wasn't told was that she would be sterilised as well. **Emily Buchanan** reports on a policy of social cleansing in Canada

"*HOW COULD* a mother hate her daughter so much to have left me here?" The tears rolled down her face as the memories flooded back. Leilani Muir, a bright and articulate 52-year-old, was revisiting the institution that labelled her, at the age of 11, "a mentally defective moron". She was left at the bottom of the steps leading to the entrance by her mother, an alcoholic who never wanted a daughter and had taken out her anger on the little girl with regular beatings. That day in July 1955, her mother drove off without even saying goodbye. But like hundreds of other abused and neglected children, Muir had escaped one nightmare only to enter another.

She thought she was being sent to an orphanage. Instead, she had been left in the Provincial Training School for the mentally deficient in Red Deer in the heart of Canada's farm belt. She had no idea that it was the main centre for a government policy of social cleansing. Virtually everyone who entered it was deemed to have inferior genes and was forcibly sterilised. The Red Deer School was implementing a law that had been on the statute books in Alberta since 1928, the Sexual Sterilisation Act. The law was not repealed until 1972, too late to save nearly 3,000 young people from being mutilated.

One of the most chilling aspects of Alberta's sterilisation policy was the way in which it was cloaked in scientific respectability through the setting up of the Eugenics Board: four adults, two of them doctors, who interrogated the children when they reached puberty. It didn't matter what the terrified child said, the verdict was nearly always the same: sterilisation. Some victims remember being asked who the premier of Alberta was, or at what age a baby walks, apparently to assess whether they were capable of "intelligent parenthood".

Muir barely contains her anger at the memory of her session with the board. "They were playing God with people's lives. Five minutes of our lives, that's all it took. It was a rubber stamp, cows on a conveyor belt, that's what it was. If we were morons, what were they?"

Days after appearing in front of the board, Muir was told she was to have her appendix out. They did take her appendix out; what they didn't tell her was that they removed her fallopian tubes as well. A decade later, after she was married, Muir visited a doctor to find out why she wasn't getting pregnant. It was only then that she discovered the truth. The doctor described her insides as "being as if she'd been through a slaughterhouse". But it is not only the physical scars that have haunted her: when she tried to adopt, she was refused because of the stigma of being an ex-inmate of Red Deer.

Muir spent six years suing the provincial government of Alberta. Last year she won her case and was awarded $750,000 in compensation; 700 other victims are now suing the state. Each has a horror story, but they have stayed silent for years, terrified that if they complained, they might be sent back.

The case of Matilda Kiesling illustrates how perverse the system was. Now 57 and a nurse, she lives with her husband in a neat flat in Edmonton. When Matilda was 13, she was raped five times by local boys. When the social worker came, Matilda was charged with "sexual immorality" and put under the jurisdiction of the juvenile offenders court. In March 1955, she was placed in Red Deer, with the agreement of her father, and classed as a "mentally defective moron". On her arrival, other inmates told her that she, like them, would be sterilised. Matilda wrote frantically to her relatives, but all her letters were intercepted. She remembers crying and



Look back in anger . . . Leilani Muir outside the Alberta institution in which she was forcibly sterilised

pleading with the doctors not to have the operation. But only a month after she was admitted, they removed her appendix and severed her fallopian tubes.

Hundreds of men were sterilised too. One was Wayne Rustin who went to stay with his father, but was admitted to Red Deer because his father couldn't cope with him. After he was sterilised, his father committed suicide when he realised what he had done to his son.

Alberta's policy of sexual sterilisation was a byproduct of the new theories on heredity emerging in the 1920s, coupled with the deep insecurities of a young frontier community. Selective breeding of livestock was seen to help on the farms; it was only a small mental step to see it could be used to improve the human stock too.

Building their new Jerusalem, Albertans felt threatened by growing immigration from eastern and southern Europe, as well as a surge in crime, prostitution, venereal disease and alcoholism. Mental and moral deficiency was thought to be transmitted from one generation to the next through genes. The Sexual Sterilisation Act offered reassurance to the middle classes that social harmony could be restored by stopping undesirables from breeding.

Thirty US states also conducted forced sterilisations in the twenties and thirties, but these petered out after the second world war. Professor Douglas Wahlsten, a leading psychologist at the University of Alberta, described the government of Alberta as "the only jurisdiction in the British Empire where eugenic sterilisation was vigorously implemented". After the war, while Nazis were being hanged in war crimes trials for their eugenics programmes, "lessons from this dark period of human history appeared to have little or no impact on the operation of the Alberta Eugenics Board". During the fifties and sixties, the board adopted procedures that were beyond public scrutiny and even outside the law — with the tacit support of Alberta's rightwing Social Credit government.

The documents in Leilani Muir's case prove how science and psychology were hijacked to justify an élitist and racist political agenda. On the physician's certificate entering her into Red Deer, under "facts indicating mental deficiency", the observation was made that she was a "pleasant-looking child who talks easily". When she was presented to the Eugenics Board, she was classed as a "mentally defective moron", despite her school report that she was good at spelling and arithmetic.

MUIR came from a poor family who moved frequently and the identity of her father was uncertain; she was also accused of showing "a definite interest in the opposite sex". The verdict of the board: "There was a danger of the transmission to the progeny of a mental deficiency or disability, also incapable of intelligent parenthood."

The provincial government of Alberta is still refusing to compensate the 700 other sterilisation victims, even though there is a budget surplus of $2.2 million. The government argues that it is not the taxpayers of today who should pay for the faults of yesterday. But Muir insists it is still the government's role to compensate for the damage — even though no amount of money can make up for the loss. As she plays in the snow with her great-niece and nephew, she is reminded of how much she had wanted children. "You can't put a price on a child's life, you can't put a price on what they took away from me as a woman. My heart is breaking and it will until the day I die."

Pounding the beat in search of a car

JOHANNESBURG DIARY
Chris McGreal

HAVING your car stolen in South Africa is not nearly as bad as the police finding it again. And then there are the times when the cops themselves take it.

My car first disappeared six months ago while someone was emptying my house of its entire contents without any of the neighbours noticing. Almost all the burglars left behind was the teapot, a Rwandan mask (which others have blamed as the dark source of miseries) and, most bafflingly, a venerable recording of Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols.

On the scale of crimes in South Africa these days, straightforward robbery is something of a relief. If you're not home, you've had a lucky escape. Murder and rape are common byproducts of a break-in. Afterwards there was little to do but buy an alarm system. As the most valuable thing in the house, it protects itself and not much else.

The local police were sympathetic if a little short on help. "Shame," said the constable on the phone. "But we don't have a vehicle. Could you pick us up and we'll come and look?"

I hadn't given a thought to the car. A dash to the garage revealed it, too, was empty. The local constabulary said it was too far to walk and suggested calling the Flying Squad. They arrived two hours later and said there wasn't much hope. The fingerprint man came the following week and asked why I'd closed the window the burglars had broken.

That was it for about four months. The insurance cheque was in the post when the car popped up as the getaway vehicle in a robbery in Soweto. The smart thing would have been to keep my mouth shut and the insurance money.

Johannesburg police tow the stolen cars they find to a compound at Diepkloof in Soweto. It seems a strange choice of location when most of the stolen cars — or at least the ones the police most cared about in the bad old days — belong to whites. And white people just don't like going to Soweto.

In Diepkloof, I discovered it didn't matter. Many people don't bother to collect their cars. Usually they are half-wrecked by the time they have been found. And what the thieves haven't stripped, the police at the car pound make off with.

A traffic cop at Diepkloof explained it to me as a mutually beneficial arrangement. The owners get the insurance money and the police strip the cars before auctioning off the shells, usually at knockdown prices, to friends, relatives and business associates. Then the missing parts are reunited with the vehicles and the new owners make a killing selling them off as smart second-hand cars.

I knew nothing of this. The police report says mine was in running order when they found it because someone was behind the wheel trying to make a getaway. By the time I saw it, the car had been stripped of most of its movable parts. Auction time was nearing.

The insurance coughed up for repairs. Weeks later, the car was delivered with the mechanic promising it was as good as new. Within two days it had disappeared while parked on a Johannesburg street. The police had taken it. "Ah, we towed that car. It's stolen," the constable explained. Yes, I said, the car had been stolen but it had been recovered and I had the certificate to prove it. The police computer said otherwise.

It was generally agreed there had been a mistake. The policeman assured me it was easily rectified. Then came the dreaded words. Go to Diepkloof car pound. It was inevitable really. The car had only been gone a few hours but it had been stripped while in the custody of the police.

A constable noted my battery had gone and helpfully informed me that second-hand ones were on sale a mile down the road. Another asked me how much I wanted to sell the car for. The mechanic who towed my car from the compound for repair once before spotted me and took pity. Hours later, various bits and pieces had got it into vaguely working order.

Before I could leave, the police insisted I sign a form indemnifying them from all responsibility for events inside their own compound. Fearing the juicy new parts might disappear if I didn't move the car soon, I signed in exchange for watching a policeman remove it from the stolen vehicle list.

A mile down the road the car spluttered to a halt. Someone had drained the petrol. I headed for my local police station to report the redistribution of parts. The constable stared at the statement explaining the mistaken towing and dismantling. His brow furrowed. "So," he said. "I'll report the car as stolen. Is that right?"

Kings of the monkey puzzle

David McKie meets the master compilers of the cryptic clue

A PUZZLEMENT of Guardian crossword compilers emerged blinking from behind their pseudonyms recently to salute the paper's retiring crossword editor, John Perkin, and welcome his successor, Professor Hugh Stephenson.

These people rarely appear in public. Armed with dictionary and thesaurus, they worked from home long before it was fashionable. Theirs is an intense, mildly obsessive world, where words are valued not just for their meaning but for what you can turn them into. Where ordinary folk look at a carthorse and see a carthorse, crossword setters see a potential orchestra. Where we see mere phone boxes, they swiftly discern the hidden shapes of xenophobes.

They are masters of ambiguity. Hereford may point you towards a town, but what you want may have something to do with cattle. A flower in a crossword may indicate a cowslip or an aster, but it could also be a river, since rivers flow. The word cow may evoke a ruminant, but the answer you need may have more to do with intimidation.

The Guardian has never maintained the ghoulish tradition of papers like the Observer, where compilers took their names (Torquemada, Ximenes) from the Spanish inquisition. Your Guardian expert is likely to be milder, even cuddlier: Araucaria (the monkey puzzle tree); Chifonie; Plodge. But that doesn't mean that they don't sit down of a morning aiming at fiendishness.

Bunthorne, for instance — Bob Smithies, a photographer for the Guardian in Manchester when he started contributing — is the master of the endless anagram. Perhaps the most famous had to do with an oil sheikh, a girl and a gin palace. Translated, it gave: What is a nice girl like you doing in a place like this, eh?

Recently even that was overtaken by a 77-letter anagram perpetrated by Paul (John Halpern): "Here 'n' there in the heaven's watery mire are tiny slits, so the harsh weather is slight, not bulky". Just in case you haven't got there already, that's a quotation from Spike Milligan: "There are holes in the sky where the rain gets in, but they're ever so small, that's why rain is thin".

For many of those who gathered in Manchester late last month, though, the greatest of all practitioners, on this or any other newspaper, is Araucaria, the Rev John Graham, who has a huge and learned repertoire.

For some of the younger setters, meeting the master was an awesome moment, rather like meeting Shakespeare.

John Perkin, who joined the paper in 1955 (and was editor of the Guardian Weekly until 1993), has been its crossword editor for 37 years, though in the way of the Guardian then it was 15 years before he got the title that went with the job. Not all his stable made it to Manchester. The official photograph contained not a single woman: the three regular women setters (Crispa, Audreus and Plodge), one of whom works from Vence in the south of France, couldn't make it. Audreus, it transpired recently, is the mother of Shed, while Gemini is two people — Vincent McLachlan and Walter Reid, who are teachers in Northern Ireland.

Araucaria's favourite long-running anagram, by the way, though shorter than Paul's, has for sheer ingenuity probably never been bettered. "O hark, the herald angels sing the boy's descent which lifted up the world." Still baffled? Try the first two lines of "While shepherds watched . . ."

Headed for millennium meltdown

We've put our world in the hands of computers, but our future could explode in 2000, writes **Alex Bellos**

CRAZED members of bizarre millennium cults no longer have a monopoly on the belief that the end may be nigh. Some of the most respectable and earnest folk in the land, from city bosses and captains of industry to politicians and civil servants, are all uniting in a warning chorus that the Western world faces meltdown — economic chaos, social disorder and political upheaval — the nanosecond that 1999 becomes 2000.

It is one of the 20th century's most brutal ironies. January 1, 2000 is essentially an arbitrary convention, neither 2,000 years from Jesus's birth nor an obvious indicator of any cosmic happening. Yet we have imbued it with a kind of mythical power that has produced a global feeling of anxiety, self-reflection and doom. Now, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the millennium could bring chaos to the Western world because of one problem: the inability of computers to distinguish 2000 from 1900.

The problem is embarrassing in its simplicity; but more embarrassing still in its potential consequences. If dates are muddled, then computer systems will churn out wrong numbers. For banks, governments, factories, shops, hospitals, air traffic control systems — in fact, every business that uses a microchip — this could precipitate a total collapse. "The very best outcome is severe economic depression," says Peter de Jager, a Canadian consultant who has been preaching about the so-called Millennium Bomb for the past six years.

Another doom-monger says: "I am quite comfortable in predicting that at least 1 per cent of businesses will fail. That's a hell of a lot. I regret that that is optimistic. Many say that up to 20 per cent will fail. People will be thrown out of work. The real message is not that it is a computer problem. It is that if it is not fixed there will be social and political consequences."

Were that merely the attitude of a computer analyst, it might be possible to dismiss it as self-serving hype. But it's the establishment view; from Robin Guenier, executive director of Taskforce 2000, the body appointed by the British government set up to warn businesses to update their computer systems.

Results of a Taskforce 2000 survey last month added fuel to de Jager and Guenier's worst fears: only 28 per cent of senior managers in the UK were aware of the problem. It's already too late to completely fix it in time for companies that have not started looking at the problem.

One of the reasons so few people know about it is that the media have — for once — been guilty of not sensationalising a sensational story. Among the organs of the executive class the attitude has generally been that the Millennium Bomb will go phut and not bang.

Until this month. The Financial Times printed a front-page story on March 5 that was a thinly disguised public apology for playing down the risks of the problem in an editorial the week before. More than half the letters page was dedicated to the issue, with the overwhelming opinion that the FT had misjudged its coverage in being too complacent.

Guenier adds: "This is the biggest IT issue ever. If anything, it's being underhyped. And what's embarrassing is that it's a totally man-made, idiotic problem."

Defusing the Millennium Bomb has been called "the most expensive single problem in human history". A United States research company estimates that the global cost will be $1.2 trillion, about three times what is spent each year on information technology. Wild exaggeration? Maybe not. Of the businesses that are admitting the scale of the problem, NatWest is spending $160 million in the next two years. Elaine Eustace, associate director of CMG's Year 2000 Centre says that "every major organisation is spending tens of millions". That makes several billion dollars in Britain alone.

So what is the problem and why are people only sitting up and noticing now? The time bomb was armed back in the early days of computer technology, when dates were represented by two digits. So 1965 would be 65 and so on. There was not enough memory space then to add a third or fourth digit. It would work well for 30 years. The difficulty arises when 99 becomes 00 and the computer starts to believe it has gone back in time.

With the pace of technological change, few of the original programmers could have imagined that their "antique" systems would still be in use at the end of the century. But, says consultant Bea Herz, "the programmes have worked 100 per cent for the last 30 years. Normally, the big number-crunching accounts run on these things. They were written at great expense years ago — why change it?"



The story is much more than just about technology, it is about how companies are run. As well as a feeling that old programs would be superseded, there was also a communications gap between company chiefs and IT managers. IT departments have terrible reputations: computer systems are always late, always overpriced and never deliver what they should.

ACCORDING to Herz, a programmer in the vintage language Cobol for 17 years, IT departments have been wary of approaching executives to tell them about a problem they will need to spend millions of pounds resolving for no apparent benefit.

Businesses relying on old mainframes, such as many in the financial sector and especially government departments, definitely have a problem. So, it now appears, do people who use "embedded chips", processors with operating and timing software, which are used in everything from traffic lights to warplanes.

Many personal computers are also affected. "Give me any computer programme. Within an hour we can demonstrate that there is something going wrong," de Jager says. Try it yourself. Change the date on your PC to December 31, 1999, then wait. Guenier did as much on his Windows package and the following day he was told it was January 4, 1980.

Another reason companies have been slow to confront whether or not their systems are, in the jargon, "2000-compliant", is that nobody knows what will actually happen if the problem is not fixed. It is possible nothing much will.

But the nightmare scenario is terrifying: all electronic money could be wiped off, databases that calculate bills, tax, insurance or mortgages could start to spew out incorrect information. Companies could destroy vast amounts of information, or even products — as has reportedly already happened when a life assurance company deleted 2,000 customer files and a supermarket chain binned a consignment of tinned corned beef. The fact that NatWest is spending $160 million shows that senior people believe the latter is likely.

At first there were only a few voices warning of gloom. The attitude towards them tended to be that they were either quacks or greedy computer programmers fuelling a conspiracy theory that would line their pockets.

David Atkinson, Labour MP for Bournemouth East, was the first parliamentarian to take an interest. He was horrified at what he saw and tried to introduce legislation to force companies to introduce audits of their computer systems, and report on the outcome to shareholders. His Private Member's Bill — which had the support of the chairman of many of the top 100 companies — was killed off at the committee stage last month.

The Government's effort to deal with the problem was the setting up last August of Taskforce 2000 with a grant of $270,000. "The British government is not doing very much but arguably is doing more than any other," says Guenier. "The MoD [Ministry of Defence] is scared shitless by it: military systems are full of embedded chips."

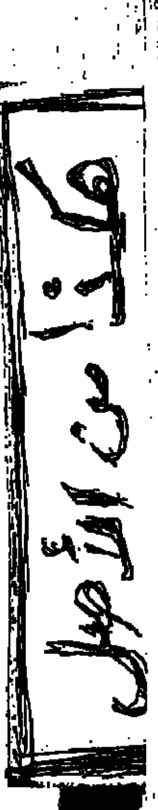
It is also beginning to dawn on the opposition Labour party that disaster could potentially fall in the middle of a Blair administration. "This could be a very expensive cost to an incoming government," says the shadow technology minister, Geoff Hoon.

There are other potential political implications. It has been suggested that the future of a single European currency could be put in jeopardy, not for once because of objections from the Eurosceptics, but because computer programmers will be so overloaded by the 2000 crisis they won't have time to produce the software needed for currency convergence.

There are many ways to solve the problem but most of them are laborious and time-consuming. For some systems there is no option but to go through every single line of computer code to check if there is a date reference. (The estimate is that it will cost $1.10 a line). For others it may be possible to use bridging software to link both millenniums.

It is now accepted that it is too late for every business to become totally 2000-compliant in time. Would it be wise then to withdraw all our money from banks, and never use our PCs from 1999? De Jager believes that the banking sector has been the most rigorous in dealing with the problem and and thinks that money, at least, will be safe.

If the right people start to make the right decisions, giving the problem the priority it deserves, there will probably be few major dramas on the day. The software equivalent of leather patches will hold most of Britain's electronic infrastructure together. It is unlikely that planes will fall out of the sky. Though you may have problems finding anyone prepared to fly you to countries with old computers.




A Fiennes romance

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

ONE OF the hottest favourites for the Best Film Oscar for some time, The English Patient arrives in Britain trailing so much glory that Anthony Minghella, its writer and director, seems as entitled to crow with triumph as George Lucas is with Star Wars.

He's entitled because, like Star Wars, the film proved intensely difficult to finance, hard to make, and was certainly not expected to make the American critics jump to it with superlatives.

But some international critics at the recent Berlin film festival pronounced it portentous and dull, and the jury only gave it the rather eccentric award of Best Actress not for Kristin Scott Thomas, who well deserved it, but to Juliette Binoche.

So what is it really like? Do not, I beg of you, think you are about to see Lawrence Of Arabia or Casablanca. Minghella himself thinks it owes a greater debt to something like From Here To Eternity, and he's right. The film is an epic, and adult, tale of doomed romance — of the kind Hollywood used to make but now doesn't dare in case its core audience of 17- to 25-year-olds get bored.

In a certain sense, this is why the mostly old hands at the Academy are so pleased with it. It reminds them of the times when you could take a piece of "literature" like Michael Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel and hope to make a film of it that's successful at the box-office. There's an element of "thank God" about all those nominations.

The first thing to say is that it looks pretty toothsome. Added to that there is one of those music scores (by the estimable Gabriel Yared) that swirls around you like an enveloping mist. Finally, and crucially, there's the acting which has an old-fashioned intensity about it, especially from Ralph Fiennes and Scott Thomas.

Both Fiennes, as the badly burnt English patient, who turns out to be Hungarian, and Scott Thomas as the married woman who embarks on a hopeless and passionate affair with him, somehow make the story's less convincing flights of fancy, such as the fatal cave scenes and the march across the desert without water or food, seem tolerable.

These are, in one way or another, injured people in extremes. And so are most of the others, so that sometimes you wonder whether there is anyone in the film not badly wounded, either in love or war. There is melodrama whispering everywhere. But the film is good enough to stop it raising its voice too high.

Binoche is excellent in the first half of the film as the faithful nurse, but can't quite make her emotionally saving romance with Naveen Andrews's Sikh bomb disposal expert into the film's real moment of hope. While Willem Dafoe, playing Caravaggio, the drug-addicted spy with his thumbs cut off, does everything he can to suggest the deadening bitterness the part implies.

The film is very long, and doesn't sustain itself completely. Something happens in the last half hour or so to weaken the tension and make one doubt its emotional logic.

But for most of the way Minghella has given us an intelligent, tense and satisfying drama that's epic in scale but intimate in its study of character. That's a pretty difficult equation, and we must thank Saul Zaentz, the producer, for having kept the faith when so many doubted.



Burning love . . . Ralph Fiennes in the heavily Oscar-nominated The English Patient

Cut and trust

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

A JEWISH Wedding (BBC2) had a notable first, an adult circumcision. Steve, engaged to Michaela, had decided to go the whole hog, so to speak, and convert to Judaism.

It reminded me of one of Lawrence Durrell's Antrobus stories. When the British embassy in some unspecified sheikdom received an invitation to a joyful circumcision, Antrobus, a junior diplomat, was detailed to turn up and try not to faint. The circumcisionee turned out to be an Oxford boxing blue who, when he realised the treat in store, laid about him with a will. Paying particular attention to the loony with the rusty knife.

No relation, of course, to Steve's surgeon. The camera withdrew demurely. The offending member was brushed with, it seemed to me, a pastry brush and tied with blue ribbon. The surgeon held up a strip a foot long. Good God, was that it? Oh, I see, a bandage.

This little difficulty behind him (or, of course, in front), Steve was plunged into the showbiz spectacular of the wedding.

Food came first. Colin, the bride's father, who is the shape that tailors used to call stylish stout, wanted bread-and-butter pudding, spotted dick, treacle tart and baked jam roll. What he got was a three-tier cake, hot chocolate pudding with chocolate sauce, sorbets in brandy-snap baskets, bread-and-butter pudding (hurrah!), orange-and-brandy pudding, fresh fruit salad, crème brûlée, chocolate mousse, sticky toffee pudding, apple flan, crêpe suzette and Danish pastries. ("Just a nosh," said Bernie modestly.)

Bernie was the caterer, chief nourisher in life's feast. Colin, the pudding-fancier, had outgrown three dinner suits — medium large, extra large and double extra large — but you should see Bernie.

Then the jokes for the speech. Warren of Heads I Do (hair styling for the modern man) ran through his repertoire for Colin's benefit. "A prostitute goes up to a Jewish man . . ." Oi, Warren, no! as Harry Enfield would say. In fact, why not hire Harry? The thought of the bill made your eyes water.

Then the car, an unusually tall classic taxi. Then the dress. "It gives me a waist," said Michaela. It is traditional at a Jewish wedding to lift the bride and groom shoulder-high and Michaela was trying to lose weight. "I went to a wedding once and they couldn't lift the bride up. You could see them *sweat!*"

Steve's parents, Bob and Doris, sat side by side sending out rays of self-restraint. They were watching a video of a Jewish wedding. Everything seemed larger and louder than life. The very TV set seemed to bulge and grow circular like Bernie. Doris, having given the matter some thought, said it seemed "glitzy. By", she added fairly, "Church of England standards."

Outrage behind the decorum

OBITUARY
Fred Zinnemann

FRED ZINNEMANN, who has died aged 89, was modest and reticent to degrees unexpected in a movie director. He hated public speaking and crowded occasions.

The deafness that overtook him in later years meant that he was a Londoner who seldom went to the movies or the theatre. But he had loyal friends who knew that the very private man was also proud and — in the best sense — egotistical. Like his old friend Billy Wilder, he sometimes felt a little passed over by fickle tastes.

Twice in his lifetime, Zinnemann had sweeping nights at the Oscars when he had no choice but to be the centre of attention. In 1953, he won Best Director for From Here To Eternity, which also took the award for Best Picture. In 1966, he did that double again on A Man For All Seasons. Both pictures showed the kind of man and courage that elects to swim against the stream of compromise and team spirit — and this was how Zinnemann saw himself.

Of course, he never claimed to be the author, or artist, on such ventures: he had James Jones's novel and Robert Bolt's play to work with. Nor did auteurist critics hail him for his style or camera personality. Indeed, in his book The American Cinema, Andrew Sarris put Zinnemann in the "Less Than Meets the Eye" category, and spoke of the defects of "neatness and decorum".

But Hollywood viewed those qualities in a different light. For the big studios, Zinnemann was reliable, dramatic, yet tasteful and non-assertive. His great courtesy as a man extended to actors and crews. He worked patiently and tidily, with respect for budgets, and he safely delivered big pictures.

If such praise sounds cramped, we should recollect that, in 1953, James Jones's From Here To Eternity seemed an unfilmably raw book. Yet Zinnemann pulled it off in ways that satisfied huge audiences without offending Columbia, the studio, or Jones. Zinnemann had his boss Harry Cohn's support, as well as an adroit screenplay by Daniel Taradash. But, in 1953, the sexual material was palpable beneath the surface, and the elements of violence, destructive independence and institutional tyranny were quite clear within the melodrama.

Zinnemann was Viennese, born in 1907. He startled his family by giving up law for a shot at movies. He went to Paris to study the camera (he was an ardent still photographer all his life, who took special pride in a Victoria & Albert exhibition of his work). When he moved to Berlin in 1929 he was one of a remarkable quartet — with Billy Wilder, Edgar Ulmer and Robert Siodmak — who made a documentary feature, People On Sunday. All four would become success stories in America.

When Zinnemann went West, he worked for Robert Flaherty, he assisted on an Eddie Cantor picture, and he made a film in Mexico with Paul Strand, The Wave. But by 1937, he was at MGM in the short-feature department. It was a tremendous training in economic story-telling and learning how to get along with a studio, and it led Zinnemann at last to fully-fledged features.

In the decade or so before From Here To Eternity, he did some remarkable work on stories that showed the damage or after-effect of war: The Seventh Cross (1944) is about escapees from a concentration camp searching for a safe haven; In Act Of Violence (1948), a soldier comes back from war seeking vengeance on the man who betrayed him in action; in The Men (1950), Marlon Brando made a dramatic case for paraplegics; while in Teresa (1951), Pier Angeli was an Italian GI bride unhappy in New York.

High Noon (1952) is famous for its rigid limits of time and space, for its parable on a community's disintegration under threat, and the hunched majesty of Gary Cooper's sheriff. Writer Carl Foreman was about to become a victim of McCarthyism, and producer Stanley Kramer was a Hollywood liberal. Zinnemann was content to diagram the action and build the tension. As so often in his career, he never saw himself as a dominating figure but as someone who helped others do their best.

After From Here To Eternity, he was a major director, and as such he was given some big projects with which he was less than comfortable. The musical Oklahoma! (1955) is defiantly earthbound. A Hatful Of Rain (1958) is a venture into neurosis and drug-taking that seemed alien to the director. The Nun's Story (1959), The Sundowners (1960) and Behold A Pale Horse (1964) were all starry, respectable but rather old-fashioned. A Man For All Seasons, similarly now feels too high-minded and schematic for the age of The Graduate and Bonnie And Clyde. But Zinnemann appreciated the restrained humanism of Bolt's play and he won fine performances from a strong cast.

He worked slowly by then, and he was much pained in 1969 when MGM abandoned André Malraux's Man's Fate a few days before shooting was to start. He was then based in England and it was from there that he did The Day Of The Jackal (tense but oddly technical), Julia (his heartfelt tribute to Jewish origins and the Europe he had known), and Five Days One Summer (an insipid romance set against the world of mountaineering).

His autobiography, published in 1992, was generous to everyone, without disclosing more than a gracious servant to story in Zinnemann himself. He seemed reserved in the new age of artist directors. But times have moved on so that now we can feel wistful for his great tidiness.

He and his wife of over 50 years lived in London, latterly on Mount Street, where he kept an office above their flat. He was most at ease one on one, and he was always a kindly, tactful guide to the young, a gentle man.

David Thomson

Fred Zinnemann, director, born April 29, 1907; died March 14, 1997

Spinning humans into alien forms

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

IN THE 1920s, there was a whacky Bauhaus choreographer called Oscar Schlemmer who hated the idea of his dances getting cluttered up with people. In pursuit of his desire to see pure shapes, patterns and colours moving around the stage he put his performers in costumes that virtually obliterated their human form.

Not surprisingly Schlemmer's choreography has not survived, but there remains a direct line between his ideas and the work of today's cult French choreographer Philippe Decouflé, whose latest show, Decodex, ended its world tour at Woking Dance Umbrella earlier this month.

In France, Decodex, with just nine dancers, three musicians and an angel in pink fur, has become the kind of obsession that Riverdance is here.

Like Schlemmer, Decouflé is fixated on the ways in which human bodies can be transformed into alien forms. So, in Decodex, the dancers come on stage with huge proboscises waving from their arms and waist. They look like neither fish nor fowl, man nor beast but strange creatures sprung from the fantastical menagerie of their creator's imagination.

The costumes and optical tricks alone are worth an evening out. There is the knight in armour whose helmet is fashioned in the shape of a towering torso and head — turning him into a 10ft-tall giant. There is a duet performed with some clever mirrors that allow the dancers to appear and disappear mid-move. There is a trio of dancers whose arms are encased in giant suction tubes, gently expanding and contracting like the suckers of some monstrous sea creature.

But the show is not just a catwalk for clever visuals, for Decouflé uses his designer's ideas to create magical, exaggerated dance and movement that the body could not manage solo. The dancer with the proboscis undulating from his waist spins through a string of turns and we see him transformed into a kind of catherine wheel surrounded by extra rings of motion. The man with a rubbery antenna waving from his head ripples a long, lazy undulation through his spine, and the movement continues in an elegant wave up the length of the rubber.

As the show progresses, Decouflé starts to show us more of his dancers unencumbered by costumes and special effects — the idea being that the ordinary human body is equally capable of wonders. Certainly a ballerina whipping through her 32 *fouettés* becomes a magical abstract of turning power.

But though Decouflé creates a couple of memorable movement images, his choreography rarely achieves the scale, the sophistication and the artfulness of the special effects. That said, the show moves so fast, its tricks are so magical, and its motives so purely engaging that to quibble is to resist the central fact that it makes children of us all.

Spice, the final frontier

With hit singles in 27 countries, the Spice Girls are the biggest British pop export since the Beatles. Where will it all end, ask **Larry Elliott** and **Sarah Ryle**

SO WHEN can we expect Sgt Pepper Spice and All You Need Is Spice? They've had four singles from one album straight in at number one, they are feted by all the posh television shows, they have the world at their platform-soled feet. Just back from a whirlwind and carefully orchestrated tour of the United States, the Spice Girls are the biggest British pop export since the Beatles.

But what an export. On the face of it they are just five ordinary — and fairly ordinary looking — girl-next-door types. It is this that has made it so very easy for canny marketing men to come up with what is seen as the formula for global pop domination in the late 1990s.

Yet this approach has been tried and has failed spectacularly in the past. Take five pretty young things, male or female, add a dollop of image, a pinch of attitude and mix liberally with hype before cooking on a high heat in as many radio and TV studios as you can find.

The Wannabe sensations who have fallen flat on their faces have included the SG's male counterparts, Take That, who were unable to expand the boundaries of their domestic teeny bop kingdom to the overseas market that traditionally counts, America.

So what's the difference this time? For all the attempts to rewrite their early history, the Spice Girls were as manufactured as Take That. The new version of how they got together is that they all kept turning up at auditions and knew each other before hitting the big time. But this time last year, the story was different. Then, it was said that Geri Halliwell — former glamour model and recently voted Britain's favourite Spice — was united by the sits vacs columns in the music press with Mel Chisholm (Mel C), Mel Brown (Mel B) Victoria Adams and Michelle Stephenson. But Michelle did not fit the mould and was rapidly dumped in favour of Emma Bunton, the baby of the group.

"We've had so many people say they managed us, but we've all been in the music industry for years and we've done it ourselves", says Mel B. "We do everything ourselves; we're completely into girl power and there's nothing us lot can't handle."

The new mythology is that the can-do, can-have Spice Girls decided to take their destiny in their own hands by gate-crashing the office of Virgin's managing director, Ashley Newton, and switching on the routine. Rather more hopefully than convincingly, Newton has since said: "When we saw them singing in our office we realised they weren't some pieced-together vision by some male Svengali. They have their own agenda."

The group's many fans would argue that it doesn't really matter whether the band's line-up was changed for image purposes. After all, did not the Who and the Stones have their own Svengalis in their formative years? And did not the Beatles ditch their original drummer, Pete Best, when they were on the threshold of success because he did not quite fit the bill? But the comparisons with the sixties icons can be overdone. The Beatles spent three years plying their trade in Hamburg strip clubs and concert halls the length and breadth of Harold Macmillan's "you've never had it so good" Britain.

By contrast, the Spice Girls have never actually performed live in the UK and their record company, Virgin, and the promoters on the two recent visits to the US seemed to have blocked all live singing appearances after a disastrous show in Miami which ended with Mel B reportedly flicking two fingers at the audience as she walked offstage. This is not the clean-cut image that the record moguls are after. Far more helpful to future record sales is the impression the Spice Girls have given that they are avatars of the new Britain. Sitting on the plush velvet sofa on the Clive James Show they were very much like the Brian Epstein-groomed Beatles: young, fresh and polite, but conducting the interview on their own terms. By the end, James's desire to be part of the Spice phenomenon had him waving two fingers in the air proclaiming "Boy Power".

In the end, this sort of acceptance matters, because it means they have made the crossover into political consciousness. Even the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Kenneth Clarke, gingered up a speech by saying: "All I want, all I really, really want is a strong economy with low inflation and a falling Public Sector Borrowing Requirement". Or some such.

What's more, Labour took the much-reported adoration for Margaret Thatcher seriously enough to suggest some political re-education. Peter Hain, the shadow employment spokesman, invited all five for a tour of Westminster when he was lucky enough to be placed on their table at the recent Brit Awards.

This was the sort of cultural obeisance that only the Beatles have ever really managed to secure. Harold Wilson gratuitously sucked up to the Fab Four in the run-up to the 1964 election, and the Duke of Edinburgh once had to issue a clarification after his unforgivable *faux pas* that the Beatles were "on the wane". What HRH had actually said was that the Beatles "were away", Buck House said solemnly.

Jonathan King, pop star of the sixties and seventies turned industry guru in the nineties, says: "People have underestimated the remark about Margaret Thatcher being the first Spice Girl. Almost all the things they espouse are the same sort of things Maggie did without the same kind of flair. She indicated that women could do anything and she gave a clear message to 50 per cent of the population that you can be successful. The Spice Girls are not saying that they are better than men: they are just doing musically what Maggie did in politics."

The fact that serious commentators from the Face to the Spectator have been searching for socio-economic causes of the Spice Girls success is another indication of the mark they have made. There are always those who see cultural change as the harbinger of political movement, and it may be that after the dark years of the early 1990s, Britain is simply ready for a bit of feelgood.

For the first time in many years, it's no longer cool to be miserable. The Spice Girls make happy-sounding music at a time when Britain may be ready to start feeling happy again. In that case, the brouhaha about whether the Spice Girls prefer John Major to Tony Blair and whether they are really Eurosceptics or not misses the point.

The second possibility is that in some strange way the Spice Girls sum up what's going on in late 20th century Britain: an economy increasingly dominated by women, the growth of the service sector and a homogeneous global culture which means that a good night out in Singapore or Salford could mean the same thing: a Hollywood movie, a Big Mac and a bop to 2 Become 1 in a club.

Three of the five band members come from those parts of the United Kingdom that have grown in importance over the past 20 or 30 years — the Home Counties suburbs of London — which have been the spawning ground for the new service sector. There are lots of little girls out there, watching the Spice Girls turning on the Christmas lights in Oxford Street or launching the new midweek lottery, who have given up dreaming of the prince riding up on a white charger and who really, really wannabe a Spice Girl.

ONE FINAL reason for the group's domestic success may be that they represent what modern Britain is good at: extracting a great deal out of not very much through cute marketing, advertising, egregious hustling and large dollops of bullshit. But making it big in Britain is one thing. For the past 30 years, groups who have managed a string of number ones have been touted as the new Beatles, and then disappeared without trace in America. The Bay City Rollers were the biggest thing since the Beatles; Duran Duran were the biggest thing since the Beatles; Take That were the biggest thing since the Beatles. All of them were fodder for the bargain bins within a year or 18 months. On current form, there seems no reason why the Spice Girls should go the same way. Their records are selling well in the US, and even better in the Far East. The lavish promotional job being done on them is paying off.

Jonathan King says that the reason the Spice Girls are different from teeny bop bands before them is simple: they had "an absolutely great pop record", backed up with some hard work. That said, few would bet on the chances of the Spice Girls still making front-page news in 18 months' time.

For a start, there is always the risk that the bedrock of their support — young girls — grow up and find another object for their adulation. Their best hope, in that respect, may be the Asian market where they started. Second, at some point they will have to stop taking singles off their only album — Spice — and go back into the recording studio. Follow-up albums are notoriously difficult, unless you are the Beatles.

The worst case is that they — and their fans — start to take themselves seriously. It was never the same for John Lennon after he started climbing in and out of bags with Yoko.

Famous five . . . from left: Mel B, Emma, Mel C, Victoria and Geri

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What did you do in the war, Vater?

The truth is told at last about Hitler's reluctant army. And Germany doesn't like it, says **Stephen Plaice**

THE honourable German soldier coerced and corrupted by the Nazis has become one of the century's most powerful icons, an everyman for an age mired in moral ambivalence. It has been perpetuated in hundreds of films and novels, from Sam Peckinpah's Cross Of Iron, to Stalingrad, The Desert Fox and even The Great Escape.

We all know the scenarios — the decent regular officer looking on helplessly as he witnesses the brutalities of the SS, the humane prison-camp commandant driven over the edge by the Gestapo. The ordinary soldier's dilemma has even been turned into a comic cliché: witness the comic-book Krautery of 'Allo, 'Allo — "*I vas only obeying orders!*"

Military historians, too, have been anxious to put distance between the activities of the Wehrmacht and those of Hitler's Praetorian guard. This division of culpability is a reassuring myth that both the victorious Allies and the defeated Germans have found convenient. Now an exhibition, The War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941-44, has completely shattered that image.

The exhibition has been touring German cities for nearly two years, and the evidence has been snowballing all the time, as more and more ex-servicemen and their families contribute letters and photos hidden away for half a century.

Now that it has reached Munich in the conservative heartland of Bavaria, the exhibition has sparked a huge political row that has already spilled onto the streets in violent demonstrations and arrests. The reaction has inevitably brought to mind the city's most famous show — 1937's Entartete Kunst, where the Nazis held up the degenerate art of the "Jewish" Expressionists for public denunciation. Now that the deeds of the generation influenced by that show are on display, a festival of denunciation has once again begun.

The exhibition charges the Wehrmacht with major war crimes, and it is difficult to see how they can be denied. Shocking photographs from the Eastern Front show the mass execution of Jews, gypsies, prisoners of war and so-called partisans by soldiers from regular units. They leave no doubt about the zeal and enthusiasm with which the army pursued systematic extermination in Serbia, Russia and the Ukraine, with hardly a Gestapo car or an SS insignia in sight.

But the main thrust of the evidence is that it nails the lie that ordinary Germans knew nothing of the Holocaust. The letters on display, written mostly by low-ranking soldiers to their families and girlfriends, prove public knowledge and tacit support for the slaughter of the enemies of the Reich.

The tone is often missionary. The soldiers write of the need to rid the world of "subhumanity", of putting the Jews out of their "wretched misery", of a "sanitisation programme" for the white race, to which the English and Americans are "traitors".

The Wehrmacht's High Command seems to have done little to control the flow of this casual information. It's clear from these letters that many of the soldiers revelled in their gruesome work. As one soldier chattily puts it in 1942 after going on a sightseeing tour of concentration camps around Auschwitz: "It really is good to get out and see the world . . ."

Officer E, miffed at having missed out on an execution party, writes: "What a shame I couldn't have taken part in the mopping-up of these wretches. It would have been a pleasure. How my revolver would have smoked . . ." If these ordinary Germans were only obeying orders, they were doing so cheerfully, and in some cases with glee.

What is on show here is nothing short of the systematic use of the army as state executioner. The mass murders in Serbia at Cacak and Kraljevo, and in the concentration camp in Sabac, can now be ascribed to the Wehrmacht.

One of the official photographers in the "partisan" war in Serbia, Gerhard Gronefeld, has contributed to the exhibition. He was with the army when it conducted executions at Pancevo, near Belgrade. Gronefeld, who subsequently became a nature photographer for Life magazine, kept his photographs of Wehrmacht firing squads buried in his garden in case the Russians discovered them.

The most damning evidence of genocide concerns the Sixth Army during its sweep eastwards through Russia and the Ukraine. There is undeniable photographic evidence of Wehrmacht atrocities at Tarnopol, Shitomir and Charchov. The army may have been working in conjunction with Himmler's death squads, but the practical organisation of the work-them-to-death camps and mass shooting grounds was the job of ordinary army units.

While admitting army complicity in the slaughter, Germany's defence ministry still resists wholesale condemnation of its wartime troops. The official line is that the bulk of the blame lies with Nazi agencies, particularly the SD, the ruthless security service of the SS. The army has always made much of the resistance of a small group of its officers, which culminated in the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler in 1944. Hitler himself regarded the army as the "second pillar" of the Reich, after the Party. These pictures make it much more difficult for army apologists to claim it was merely coerced into helping him.

As one soldier put it after a tour of the concentration camps, 'It's good to get out and see the world . . .'

But what is also disturbing about these revelations is the apparent cover-up in the immediate post-war period. The compilers of the exhibition found army records had been systematically weeded of incriminating material. Some regimental files may well have been destroyed during the bombing, but it is hard to believe that the Wehrmacht had time to destroy all the incriminating evidence during the collapse of the Reich. Was there Allied complicity in the cover-up?

The Allies had good reason to exempt the Wehrmacht and its officers from the war trials. In the same way that the judiciary, clergy and medical profession were not taken to task about their involvement in National Socialism in case the infrastructure of the country fell apart, so the integrity of the army needed to be preserved. "Denazification" was token at best. And it is telling that it was this period that spawned the image of the "honourable" German soldier compromised by evil Nazis.





German soldiers execute suspected partisans in Minsk: two of many photographs that expose the Wehrmacht's culpability in war crimes

In Erfurt the exhibition panels were sprayed with the word "lies". In Regensburg the mayor boycotted the opening because the image it gives of the Wehrmacht "does not appeal to me". But the critics have been unable to challenge the authenticity of the photographs and letters. And so the attacks have become personal.

Pony-tailed Hannes Heer, one of the organisers, has been outed as a former communist and Maoist with a criminal record for disturbing the peace. Another, the millionaire philanthropist Jan Reemtsma, son of a prominent tobacco manufacturer, has been told that he should mount an exhibition about the victims of the tobacco industry, rather than those of the Holocaust.

On the surface, Munich has put its past as Hitler's cultural capital behind it. But perhaps it has done so a little too firmly. The monument to the victims of National Socialism, an ugly, square, vandal-proof column with an eternal flame, is tucked away apologetically at the top of the Maximillianplatz. It is tiny in comparison with the confident equestrian statues of the Bavarian kings that adorn the main squares.

Conservative Bavarians may not want to remember the war or the Holocaust. But since the exhibition opened in February they have been prepared to take to the streets and cenotaphs for the honour of Germany. The local centre-right party has been vociferous in its opposition. At a time when neo-fascism is gaining support across the country, it is making common cause with the extreme right.

After instructions by the defence ministry to counteract the negative image of the German army, the centre-right leader in Munich, Peter Gauweiler, boycotted the show's opening ceremony and held his own ceremony of remembrance at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. (Here at least was one member of the Wehrmacht nobody could accuse of war crimes.) His ceremony was well attended by old and young, some of them carrying white roses, symbol of the resistance movement during the Third Reich.

For the exhibition's organisers and their hosts, the Social Democratic city council, German honour now means coming clean — exposing the full horror of the atrocities perpetrated by previous generations. But Mayor Christian Ude and his colleagues expected trouble. No posters were put up for fear of defacement, and the opening ceremony had to be moved at the last minute. This was officially to make room for the huge crowd that was expected, but really to avoid the demonstrations taking place outside the Town Hall, where the exhibition is being held.

Nevertheless, Ude proved to be the star of the show, earning enthusiastic applause. He insisted the exhibition was not a blanket condemnation of the Wehrmacht, nor an attempt to undermine the modern army. But he pulled no punches. His generation should not feel morally superior, he said. They should count themselves lucky they never had to face the stark choice of their fathers and grandfathers — serve in a totalitarian state or be eliminated themselves . . .

The expected reaction came in the first weekend of March when far-right groups and young neo-Nazis marched through the city centre, ostensibly to counter the show's central assertions, in one of the biggest demonstrations by the extreme right in recent years.

But Munich was always like this, a forward-looking city hampered by a reactionary hinterland. And it may take more than a few honourable men to withstand the reaction.

A long gulp of Corinth

ART
Adrian Searle

WALKING around the Lovis Corinth retrospective at the Tate Gallery, London, is a lonely, unsettling experience. Lonely because the show is clearly a zilch on the Tate's Cezannometer of popularity, and dispiriting because an hour's company with the artist is about as much as this particular lifetime can bear.

Touted as one of the greats of 20th century German art, and as an "undiscovered" modern artist, Corinth comes across as an unpleasant painter and a singularly unengaging individual. This would be unfair, were it not for Corinth's constant return to himself in his paintings — as a latter-day Rembrandt, as a tippler and as a lover, glass in one hand, fiancée's nipple in the other.

Corinth was nothing if not a self-dramatist, a Falstaffian, rumbustious moiler of oils. His early career in *fin-de-siècle* Munich was conventional enough, and his portraits show him as a politely Frenchified painter — borrowing urbanity from Manet, sentimentalism from Tissot, Whistfulness from Whistler and a terrible kind of slithery, brushy pawing from late Renoir. If we can't blame him for lack of originality, nor can we hold him responsible for the sexual attitudes of his time and place. But we don't have to like him for them either.

The Tate's show (until May 4) falters along. As a painter Corinth seems to have veered between flattering academicism and a greedy devouring of early modernism. Mix all this in with pantheism, mythology, biblical rants and social-climbing flattery, and you're bound to get a very noxious brew.

Corinth, the Munich journeyman of the 1880s, took off to the Académie Julien in Paris in 1887 for four years, and achieved success in Berlin in 1900 with a truly vile painting based on Oscar Wilde's Salome, arresting not so much for its subject — Salome fingering the decapitated head of John the Baptist — as for his depiction of Salome as a gaudy premonition of Joan Crawford.

Then come the crucifixions and depositions; Odysseus kicking a beggar in the balls and clawing his eyes out; horrible nudes like Nana, trying, it appears, to back away from the man with the brush; and many, many self-portraits: fat, drunk, old, ill.

In 1911 he suffered a stroke that left him partially paralysed. His Blinded Samson of 1912, groping in his shackles, eyes covered with a bloody bandage, is a metaphor for the artist's plight.

There is something painful in Corinth's late work: it becomes pasty, clogged and definitely disturbed. There are many who see it as a facing-up to mortality. The self-portraits of his last year are undeniably wounded, fragile pictures, but great claims for them are misplaced. The failures and confusions of Lovis Corinth outweigh his skills. His humanity, however, is never in doubt.

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Father, dad or patriarch?

Katharine Whitehorn

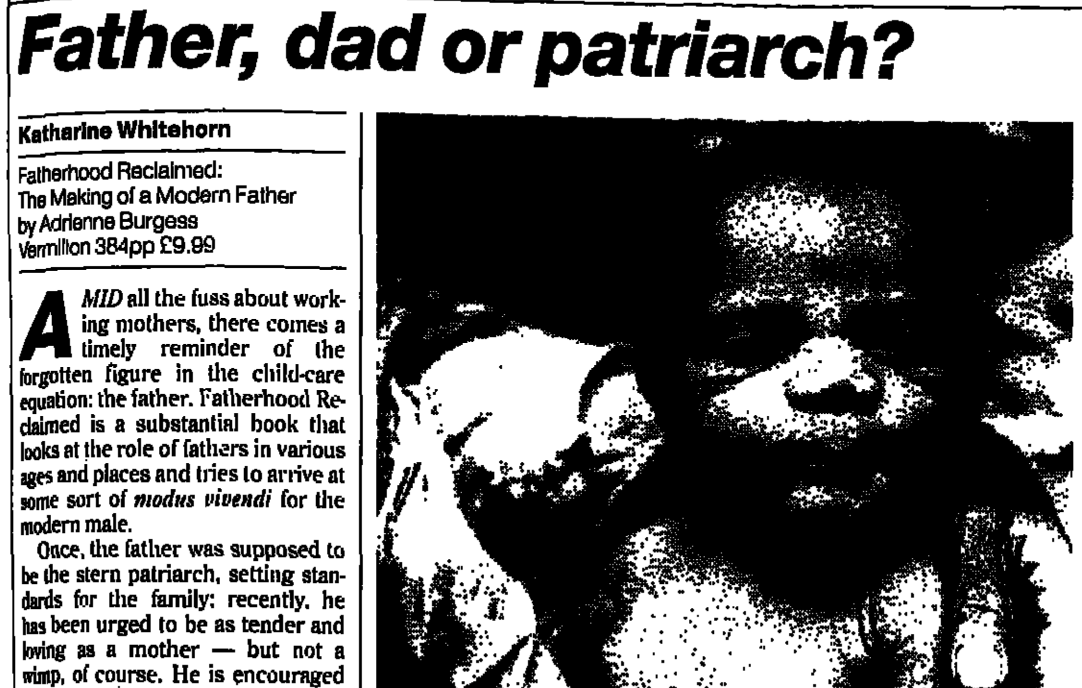
Fatherhood Reclaimed:
The Making of a Modern Father
by Adrienne Burgess
Vermilion 384pp £9.99

AMID all the fuss about working mothers, there comes a timely reminder of the forgotten figure in the child-care equation: the father. Fatherhood Reclaimed is a substantial book that looks at the role of fathers in various ages and places and tries to arrive at some sort of *modus vivendi* for the modern male.

Once, the father was supposed to be the stern patriarch, setting standards for the family: recently, he has been urged to be as tender and loving as a mother — but not a wimp, of course. He is encouraged to see his baby born — but expected to work all the hours God sends to be a good provider. No wonder the poor blokes are confused.

I doubt if this book will do much to clear their confusion — there are too many studies cited, too many patterns of fatherhood discussed, even unto the Aka pygmies where fathers do it all. But it might cheer them up a bit. For Burgess conclusively shows that it has usually been normal for fathers to be very involved with their children, particularly before the Industrial Revolution sent everybody off to work in different directions. It was even thought to be bad for children — boys anyway — to be too long under solely "petticoat government"; a man had a crucial and undodgeable role in the upbringing of his children.

It is not, Burgess thinks, that our ideas of fatherhood have not developed with changing times, but that in recent decades it has only been discussed in a feminist context. Will he do more with the children, so that she can do less? Is she having to compete at work with men supported by a wife-and-mother at home? So much emphasis on the female angle distorts the picture: what is it that fathers have to offer that is not just second-class mothering? "If images are taken from the old armoury, they have the appeal of the familiar and offer fathers an exclusive role. But they also imply hierarchical structures, which are no longer seen as tenable, and emotional distance, no longer seen as desirable. We really do not know whether fathers should be dads or patriarchs."



Fathers in the developed world are confused about their role. But in the Aka pygmy tribe, it is always the men left holding the baby

The book is written with some irony and wit, and studded with quotations, often moving, from fathers about how they feel about their children. My only quarrel is that though, most of the time, every fact is backed up by studies and citations, Burgess every now and then asserts with equal confidence something for which she offers no backing whatever, such as that sexually abusing fathers might do it less if allowed more non-sexual intimacy.

The problem peculiar to our age is, of course, the amount of fathering that goes on when the parents have split. Burgess thinks how well it can be done depends crucially on the social circumstances. And she takes the idea of equality in parenting one stage further than most in envisaging an obligation on mothers to be providers, to balance increased caring by fathers — a fairly unlikely scenario, to my mind.

But she is spot on in blaming distant and inadequate fathering most of all on the way work is organised. In Sweden (but of course), take-up of paternity leave is as high as 50 per cent; here, a man who cares too much about being around his family is going to lose out at work — "spending more time with my family", after all, is usually code for resigning altogether. Perhaps if the family-friendly policies that are currently being promoted, largely for women's benefit, could be seen as a bonanza for men, we might actually get somewhere with it; well, maybe.

This book raises more issues than it solves, but that is, perhaps, its strength. So too does being a parent.

Bakgat dictionary

Donald Woods

A Dictionary of South African English
edited by Penny Silva
Oxford 856pp £85

IF YOU arrive now-now we won't stay bad friends. I need company because I got a skrik just now when a gom threw a vrot naartjie at me — the oke was mos pranking to his tjerrie and sommer let vip. I ran into the veld in my velskoens and nearly vrekked.

In more orthodox English the above would read: "If you arrive very soon we'll patch up our quarrel. I need company because I had a bad fright a moment ago when a yobbo threw a rotten tangerine at me — the fellow was actually showing off to his girl friend and simply let fly. I ran into the open fields in my rawhide shoes and nearly died of fright." As a descendant of several generations of English-speaking South Africans I read this huge volume — 850 pages and 5,000 entries — with increasing delight, in recognition of so many old verbal friends and phrases uniquely South African — as evolved not only by my ancestors of British origin but also by speakers of the country's other main languages.

The two main contributory languages to South African English are naturally the other main languages of the country — Nguni (Xhosa-Zulu-Swazi- Ndebele) and Afrikaans, itself evolved by the descendants of the Dutch-Flemish settlers of 1652, so that "bad friends" (friends who have fallen out) comes directly from the Afrikaans "kwaai vriende".

South African English also acquires such Xhosa-Zulu words as "songololo" (a centipede that coils up when touched) and "basela" or "bonsela", a bonus or tip.

Perhaps the biggest contribution from South African English to international English is the word "trek" for a long, hard journey, though the Afrikaans word also means "pull". Also widely known is "veld", pronounced "felt", meaning open countryside. Other common adaptations from Afrikaans are "stompie" (a cigarette end; also a nickname for a short person), "takkie" (tennis shoe) and "mooi" and "lekker", meaning nice or pretty or tasty, according to inflection.

Then there is that classic South Africanism "yislike", an expression of astonishment, adoration, mystification or exasperation. It was originally resorted to by Afrikaans-speakers who didn't want to utter the name Jesus (or Yesus) profanely, and so used only the first syllable and added the "like" for further disguise. In modern South Africa, however, the whole thing of "Yislike" is usually shortened to: "Yisssssssss!" and a grandstand full of rugby watchers voicing shock at a referee with a collective "Yisssssss!" sounds like a snake-park full of enraged puff-adders.

The dictionary tries valiantly, without total success, to establish the origin of "puttyticks", meaning "simple" or "easy" or "piece of cake", but it deals marvellously with three wonderful "gat" words — slapgat, hardgat and bakgat — which are highly expressive when correctly pronounced, with the "g" sounding like the "ch" in "loch". The word "gat" not only means "hole" but often, regrettably, "arse", so that "slapgat" refers to a slovenly, undisciplined person, and "hardgat" means stubborn.

But "Bakgat!" is one of my favourites. It means "Great!" or "Terrific!", yet it was only on reading this splendid dictionary that I finally found out why. Apparently in pioneer days the Dutch could tell by taste whether bread or certain other food was baked in the best way, in a proper "Bakgat" or "bake-hole," or whether it had been baked by other, inferior means. If it was of the best, the expert would taste it then pronounce it approvingly: "Bakgat!"

This dictionary is a fine achievement — the result of a quarter-century of painstaking research and professional commitment originated by Professor William Branford of Rhodes University, Grahamstown, in South Africa's keystone province of Eastern Cape, where the country's three main languages first met and mingled.

It is also a fitting salute to South African English, not only as a vigorous young component of international English but as the language which is overwhelmingly the lingua franca for all 43 million South Africans. As such it is the country's most important linguistic bridge, linking South Africa's various communities to each other while linking their entire nation to the world.

Politics grow on trees

John Vidal

Slow Reckoning
by Tom Athanasiou
Secker and Warburg 385pp £12.99

The Killing of the Countryside
by Graham Harvey
Cape 218pp £16.99

Green Backlash
by Andy Rowell
Routledge 504pp £45hbk £12.99pbk

NOTHING yet resolves the intriguing question posed by environmentalists: if capitalism can survive only by continuing to grow, and most resources are finite, what on earth happens when the crossover point comes? Woe? Or whoa? We change thinking, or we go under. Are we there already? Perhaps. Does it matter? You bet.

Tom Athanasiou is an impressive American commentator who has minutely followed a generation of global resource politics. He sees the late 1990s — five years after the Rio earth summit, long enough after communism to count — as a defining moment in the debate about emerging political and social ideas. Here we stand, worn out democracies and rusty institutions in hand, with corporations dictating government agendas and the gap between rich and poor widening by the minute. So what next? The future, he says, is wide open for environmentalists as they begin to side squarely with the new agendas of grassroots movements, new technologies and social change.

Athanasiou identifies environmentalism as having finally grown up as a body of coherent ideas, with a much-needed group of failed and much wiser veterans to temper the old naivities. This may surprise people in Britain where green ideas have not been well served. But in the southern hemisphere, he argues, the demands of ecology and community development are now indivisible; in the North, ecology is beginning to thread a way through social justice and poor people's movements, the military economy and globalisation; and in the East, it is breeding profound doubts about the reconstruction process.

The new ecology, he says, is everywhere getting mixed up in the new real world and is muscling in on economics, justice, new democracy, even the media. It is unashamedly challenging. Moreover the new politics must be working because environmentalists are being brutally repressed, by both governments and corporations. The lessons for the mainstream groups seeking public approval is that they may become irrelevant if they do not respond to the new social agenda. They must come off the political fence.

Beware, though. Green ideas are dangerous precisely because they are some of the few still confronting vested interests and entrenched views. What happens when they really hurt is documented by Andrew Rowell in the startling Green Backlash. Rowell spells out how far Right political movements, militias, the corporate community and dodgy academics around the world are now targeting activists — in the courts, in the PR houses and with the gun. From Ogoniland and the landless squatter armies in Brazil to Fairmile may seem far, but what happens when the Davids stand up to the Goliaths can be tragic. And scandalous.

Oliver Wolston is not a little man. The Cambridgeshire farmer blew the gaff on the Common Agricultural Policy subsidy system by publicising one of his £200,000 cheques. When he started to get threatening letters from other farmers it became clear how rotten was the state of British farming, how deep the vested interests and how iniquitous the real agricultural agenda.

Graham Harvey recounts Wolston's story in The Killing Of The Countryside, one of 1997's more scary books, even if it feels curiously old-fashioned with its meaty typography and yellowing paper. This is not future shock material, with faraway forests or ecosystems at risk. Harvey documents how England is being reinvented by a small group of agro moguls with distinctly global ambitions for its future. For them the chemical industry is making nature irrelevant and but for the beef crisis, he says, the new agricultural revolution being plotted and colluded with by both major political parties might well have gone unchallenged. It is a brave, much needed book about the English illusion.

We are still waiting for the unexpurgated story of BSE, but there is a sense that a cruel and poisonous system is at work and that we are almost too blind to recognise that it is on our doorstep.

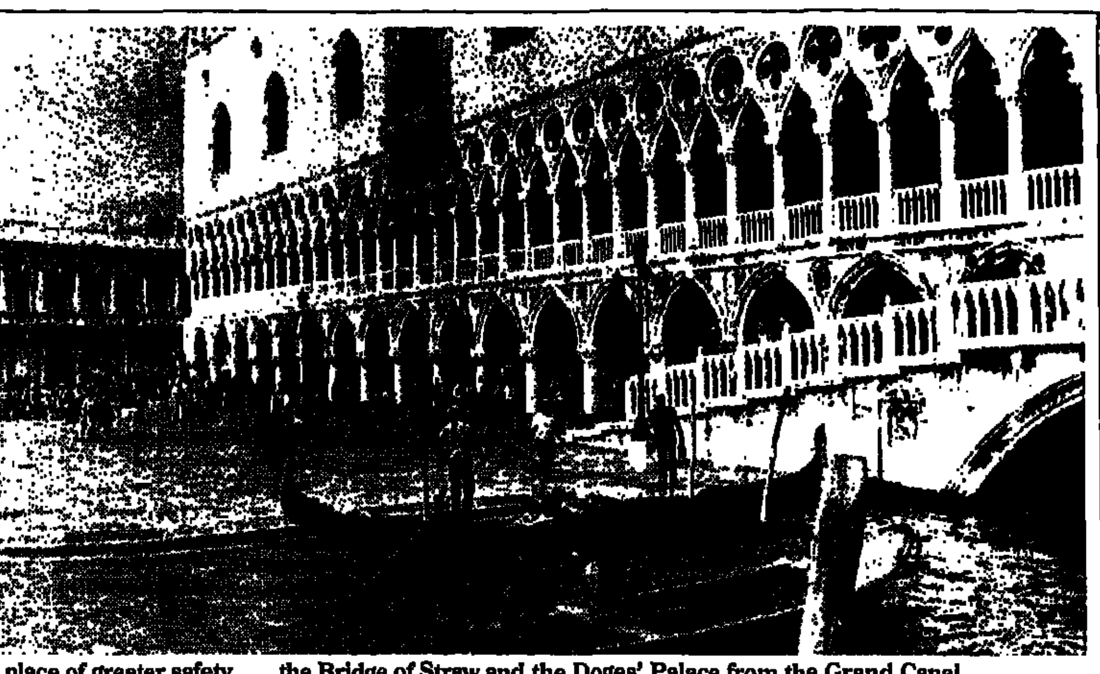
Venice's invented past

John Julius Norwich

Venice and Antiquity
by Patricia Fortini Brown
Yale 368pp £45

IT WAS when she had completed her remarkable first book, Venetian Narrative Painting In The Age Of Carpaccio, that Patricia Fortini Brown had the idea of examining how the men and women of Rennaissance Italy looked at their past history and what it meant to them. Soon, however, she realised that such a canvas was too broad; and I can well imagine with what relief she decided to focus once again on Venice. The result is a superbly produced and beautifully illustrated book, a credit to her and her publishers alike.

Historically speaking, the Venetians began with a disadvantage: they had no ancient history at all. Their neighbours on terra firma — Padua, Vicenza, Verona and the rest — had all been important cities in the days of antiquity, with magnificent monuments to prove it; but who in their senses would build more than a fishing hut on the malarial, malodorous shoals and sandbanks of the Venetian lagoon? Only when they had no choice — when, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the barbarians swept down into Italy leaving a trail of desolation and devastation behind them — did the inhabitants of those rich imperial cities flee for their lives, to the one place where the invaders had neither the desire nor the ability to follow. The lagoon may have been unwelcoming and uncomfortable, but at least it was safe. So safe that Venice was to remain an independent republic for 1,000 years — a period considerably longer than that which separates us from William the Conqueror — during which it was the only city in Italy that was never once invaded, captured or destroyed.



A place of greater safety . . . the Bridge of Straw and the Doges' Palace from the Grand Canal

But it is hard to feel proud of a funk-hole; and almost at once, those first Venetians set to work to create for themselves an appropriate past. They started a legend that they were descended from the ancient Trojans, who had sailed west with Aeneas after the fall of Troy. They brought stones and columns, carvings and inscriptions from their old homes on the mainland, embedding them in the altars and fonts — and sometimes even in the walls — of their churches. They stressed their all-important cultural links with Byzantium of whose empire in their earliest days they had technically been a part and of which, after both the Fourth Crusade of 1204-5 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, their own descendants would claim to be heirs. They maintained, none the less, that Venice, unlike other Italian towns, had been born free and Christian; and in 828 they seized from Alexandria the body of St Mark the Evangelist, thus making their city, virtually overnight, one of the principal shrines of Christendom.

Such basic facts as these constitute the author's point of departure, from which she ranges far and wide. She considers, for example, how classical ruins have been differently viewed through the ages — first as pointless clutter; then as a moral lesson illustrating the downfall of paganism; then as a useful source of building materials; then as the romantic memorials of a golden age; then as tools for historical research; and finally as objects of beauty in themselves. She discusses the deliberate copying of antique models, as in St Mark's itself — a near-replica of Justinian's church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople — and in the late-13th century bronze doors of the side portals in the west front, which are openly inspired by the sixth century pair in the central entrance. More remarkable still, perhaps, are the sarcophagi of the early doges, both in the atrium of the Basilica and on the outer façade of SS Giovanni e Paolo, parts of which are genuinely early Christian, parts brilliantly executed fakes.

She has much to tell us about the phenomenon of syncretism, which permitted the inclusion of pagan heroes on Christian monuments, and about those astonishing Renaissance tombs such as that of Pietro Morosini, which looks less like a tomb than a declaration of war. She is equally interesting about the sketchbooks of Jacopo Bellini and the antiquarian interests of Mantegna, and constantly reinforces her arguments with quotations from Italian Renaissance literature in which, as in all other departments of her chosen subject, she is alarmingly well-informed.

Let me make one thing clear: this book is not an easy read. There were moments when I felt that the author had got a little carried away by her own scholarship and allowed herself to become slightly ponderous. She writes, however, with fluency and style, and to me at least her subject is never less than fascinating. Her illustrations are superb, and though many of them are in colour I was struck again and again by the superiority of black and white, particularly in photographs of architecture and sculptural detail. Miraculously, too, these illustrations are nearly always to be found on the same page as the relevant text; Gillian Malpass of the Yale University Press deserves a special word of commendation. I spotted only one trivial misprint and, apart from one questionable point about the provenance of the Pazzetta lion, not a single inaccuracy — although, since Mrs Fortini Brown knows far more about Venice than I ever shall, this is hardly surprising. On the contrary, she has taught me a lot; and on my next visit to Venice I shall carry with me a whole sheaf of photocopied pages — though not the book, which is too beautiful and too heavy — and seek out her discoveries for myself.

If you would like to order a copy of Venice and Antiquity at the special discount price of £38 please contact Books@The Guardian Weekly

The time that land forgot

Tim Radford

Before The Beginning: Our Universe And Others
by Martin Rees
Simon & Schuster 282pp £16.99

PROFESSOR Sir Martin Rees (to give him his full title) is Astronomer-Royal, and therefore king of the heavens, and heavenly prose as well. He writes as he speaks, carefully: about things like the birth of time and the making of space, and the probability of universes that never evolved enough to produce astronomers-royal.

He took a bit of care with the future of this Universe, too. Particle physicists at accelerators at Cern in Geneva and at Fermilab in Chicago are moving ever nearer to making subatomic collisions of colossal energy. The idea is to recreate the conditions of the very early Universe. "Is there a risk that the next generation of machines could inadvertently tear the fabric of space?" he asks. "This would be the ultimate catastrophe."

Most people would be content to leave the question hanging, like the sword of Damocles, only bigger. Sir Martin and a colleague were not. They calculated that the most energetic collisions in nature would be between the cosmic ray particles spurting around the observable Universe at almost the speed of light. Their origin is a mystery, but "each of them, just a single atom, carries as much punch as a bullet or a fast-served tennis ball," he writes.

These things are rare: roughly one per square kilometre per century. Quite possibly, no two have ever collided with each other, ever. But even so, lesser particles would smack into each other, and these collisions, he calculated, would still be 100 times as large as anything ever achieved by human machines. So the scientists at Geneva could press the button safely and get on with the research. OK, so he writes that it wasn't an obvious danger — but, given what we know about creation, the possibility was not absurd. And he hopes that any extraterrestrials out there with even bigger machines are being just as cautious.

Before The Beginning is full of stuff of this sort: the universe contained in fragments, each fragment reflecting a different coloured light from the whole thing. Is there a beginning? Is there an end? Are there new universes popping into existence within our own, perhaps inside mini-black holes that create domains of space we could never know about? What is a star? What is a supernova?

This is the book for those who read A Brief History Of Time and were still left wondering whether they quite had the whole picture. This is a book for people who still ask: but what was happening before the Big Bang?

And, to answer an earlier question, what is the likelihood of ET being out there somewhere, building a particle accelerator? Actually, intelligent life could be quite rare, thinks the Astronomer-Royal. All we can say is that it evolved at least once, on the third planet from a star called the Sun. And you would certainly know that from reading this book.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (Abacus, £9.99)

WHEN revisionist "historians" quibble about the degree to which Hitler, or the German High Command, were responsible for the execution and implementation of the Holocaust, their arguments are usually met head-on; but this, or so this book implies, is to miss the point that the Germans themselves were so conditioned to believe that Jews were not even technically human, that they hardly needed any persuasion to enter enthusiastically into genocide. As one children's book put it, in 1936: "The Devil is the father of the Jew./ When God created the world, /He invented the races: /The Indians, the Negroes, the Chinese /And also the wicked creature called the Jew." The Jews were not just *Untermensch*, subhuman, but *Gegenrasse*: anti-race. This is an impressively well-documented work of history, which gives book, chapter and verse on the degree to which the Germans were steeped in anti-Semitism, and had been so for centuries. The book goes on to detail the kind of wartime atrocities that substantiate this view. This is why it is so long, so heartbreaking.

4-2, by David Thomson (Bloomsbury, £6.99)

I REMEMBER when, in my early teens, I decided it was time to stop being interested in football; such frivolity was incompatible with my chosen destiny. ("I want," I stammered to a sceptical careers master, "I want . . . to be a paperback reviewer.") What a mug. If only I'd kept at it, I could have written a Fever Pitch, or even something like this book, which is a kick-by-kick description of the 1966 World Cup Final. Oh God, you go, not that again, and I sympathize, but this is still good — great, even; it is also Thomson's stab at a life story (Thomson is normally a great film critic) and a snapshot of the sixties. Funny how his and Hornby's stories are, when not about footie, about their fathers.

Cross Channel, by Julian Barnes (Picador, £5.99)

AH — Ce Julian Barnes, l'écrivain Français — il est très connu en Angleterre aussi, n'est-ce pas? Alors, voici dix short stories, très bien écrits, très sympathiques, très grown ups, qui explorent la relationship compliquée et paradoxale entre nos deux pays. Donc, il y a une histoire qui est set dans les temps de la persécution des protestants; une histoire about les navvies anglais qui ont construit le chemin de fer entre Rouen et Paris, et une histoire set dans l'avenir — dans le Channel Tunnel lui-même! Non, honnêtement, très bien fait, formidable. Un chef d'oeuvre. Julian, nous vous embrassons. Mwah. Mwah.

Real China, by John Gittings (Pocket Books, £7.99)

A TRAVEL book, but not an indulgent one, tracing Gittings's journey from Henan Province to the island of Hainan, "Middle China", in other words, as opposed to the flash coastal zones where all the flash cash is. Virtually indispensable if you want to know more about China than you already do.

Reality check . . . Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, as interpreted by Raphael, has come under scrutiny as the lives of Jesus and his apostles are reappraised MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

Fleshing out the divine

Peter Stanford on the mad rush to publish challenging biographies of Jesus and his followers

BIOGRAPHY, publishers never cease telling us, is in the doldrums, with sales and new commissions at an all time low. If the subject is deceased, conventional wisdom runs, they have also been done to death in print. If they are living, they will keep their skeletons locked away and rubbish any book as soon as it appears.

But, apparently facing redundancy, some biographers have embarked on a novel job creation plan. They have set about finding characters who are famous enough to attract an audience, who can't answer back and who have hitherto been ill-served by the literary world: Jesus and his apostles.

Leading the pack is that grand old man of American letters, Norman Mailer. Once notorious for his womanising and drinking, this bon viveur and definer of literary chic has moved on from Picasso and assorted murderers to deliver to his American publishers The Gospel According To The Son. This first-person account of the life of Christ — already dubbed Jesus And Me by one critic of Mailer's egocentric approach — will be "neither pious nor satirical" according to his publishers Random House.

With his unusual choice of subject, Mailer is taking up a cause recently championed to great effect in America by Jack Miles, former books editor of the Los Angeles Times, whose dispassionate and myth-shattering God: A Biography sold by the bucket-load.

In similarly serious but eye-catching vein on the other side of the Atlantic comes James, The Brother Of Jesus by Robert Eisenman. Mixing scholarship — Professor Eisenman is a self-styled expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls — and the sort of sensational speculation that characterises the parallel but separate vogue for investigations into religious "mysteries", the book suggests that Mary was no Virgin and that Jesus's younger and more charismatic brother took over the mantle of leadership after the Crucifixion.

However, the pioneer in the revisionist approach to the begetters of Christianity is Andrew (A N) Wilson, ex-Anglican, ex-literary editor, prize-winning novelist and unabashed iconoclast. His highly successful 1992 biography of Jesus eschewed the traditional sugary language and ecclesiastical jargon of religious writers and took a pithy, popular, objective and historical look at Christ.

His follow-up on St Paul, mischievously published to coincide with Easter, downgrades Jesus to the role of the first century Galilean equivalent of Swampy, a flash-in-the-pan political activist within Judaism, of symbolic rather than real significance. It was Paul, Wilson contends, who founded Christianity as we know it, simply borrowing the Crucifixion as a central image to inspire his followers rather as Hovis borrowed Dvorak's New World symphony for its commercials.

Inevitably Wilson's theory has prompted cries of blasphemy in church circles. The evangelical Dean of Lichfield, the Very Reverend Tom Wright, was so outraged after seeing an advance copy of the novelist's "profoundly self-contradictory and patronising" manuscript that he has rushed into print with What St Paul Really Said. It is a stout if stodgy defence of the orthodox view that Paul was converted in a blinding flash on the road to Damascus and threw his lot in with an already flourishing fledgling church, led by St Peter.

In academic circles, attempts to reinterpret such figures as Jesus and Paul are deemed beneath contempt. Bernard Robinson, lecturer in scripture and senior tutor at the Catholic seminary of Ushaw in Durham, dismisses Wilson's view of Paul as simply reworking a discredited 19th century fad. Eisenman he condemns as a "crank".

"The gospel writers were not interested in all this psychological stuff about what Jesus was really like," says Robinson, "for the very good reason that they had a more important message to get over. So all that information is now lost for ever and to try to recreate it is pure speculation."

Robinson's particular objection is that in an attempt to popularise questions he and his fellow scholars have spent a lifetime investigating with a fine-tooth comb, non-specialist writers always vulgarise and distort.

"With the scriptures the issues are enormously complicated. You have to weigh the evidence and arrive at a truth that is a balance of all the different elements. But instead what we have here is people who can't even read Hebrew taking one strand out of a translation, out of context and building a theory around it. So Jesus is a revolutionary, a mystic, a cynic or whatever description might cause a scandal, when the truth is a bit of all of them."

The Jesus of the New Testament is certainly a curiously two-dimensional character, portrayed in terms of his deeds and homilies rather than his personality. Though his is ostensibly the best known life in the world, Christ's official biography contains none of the usual details about appearance, emotions, sexuality or tendency to dwell on his divinity rather than his humanity, with only artists and latterly Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber doing anything about fleshing out Jesus.

As well as being vague on the basic CV, the Gospels are also notoriously unreliable historically: second- or third-hand accounts of Christ produced anything from 30 to 100 years after his death by writers whose principal focus was the needs of their own period. Wilson and the authors of the new wave turn to other, sometimes more trustworthy sources to establish context before seeking psychological insights into their subjects.

Wilson is scornful of academic attempts to sideline him. "I've broken trade union regulations by writing about Paul and Jesus, so I'm treated with snooty disdain, but I suppose that is true of academics in any field."

Antonia Fraser's meticulously researched and highly popular books have likewise suffered at the hands of scholarly experts. Wilson insists his book on Paul is "not a biography in the sense, say, of Selina Hastings's biography of Evelyn Waugh but an investigation in a contemporary context of the extraordinary and energetic intellect which produced the letters which we still have."

There may be no new evidence quoted in the book but while much of what Wilson says about both Jesus and Paul has been commonplace in the seminar rooms of theological colleges for years, it will come as news to readers accustomed only to the authorised version. Just as Bishop David Jenkins in the late 1980s lifted the lid on the real opinion of his peers on the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, so Wilson is today blowing the gaff on other "facts" quoted as gospel from the pulpit.

There is, for instance, a body of evidence to suggest that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem or even in a stable (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John never mention the manger or the cattle a-lowing) but rather in the city of Sepphoris in Galilee. He was no rural boy, who came to the bright lights of Jerusalem late in his short life, but grew up in a thriving metropolis with siblings and parents who did not, Wilson suggests, consider him divine.

The sharp-eared in the pews may have already been alerted to this. The Gospels do drop clues, but any follow-up is usually stone-walled by the ecclesiastical establishment. St Peter, the first pope, is described as married, yet this is pooh-poohed in the Roman Catholic Church's ongoing debate on the priesthood. Jesus's friendship with various women, and the fact that his mission was effectively bank-rolled by Joanna, wife of one of King Herod's stewards, is likewise touched on fleetingly in the Good Book. Yet it is seldom the subject of sermons or papal encyclicals, leaving feminist historians convinced that the full extent of women's involvement in Jesus's entourage has been edited out of the Bible by a Church anxious to buttress the standing of its own all-male leadership.

Even with Paul, various hints dropped in his letters are played down. Though he is commonly quoted as having no time for women, he alludes ambiguously in his Letter To The Corinthians that he was once married. Wilson makes much of Paul's description of his father as a tent-maker. This is taken traditionally to suggest humble origins, but the author points out that in an age before travel lodges and cars, such a profession was highly prized, carried out by appointment to kings and emperors. Paul's prosperous mercantile origins and connections are key, Wilson goes on to contend, to his success in bringing the new gospel to the ruling classes of his time.

There is clearly, however, a balance to be struck in evaluating new sources that contradict the Gospels. Eisenman is one of many scholars who have based their biographies on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet these manuscripts and fragments from 22BC to 100AD, uncovered in 1947 in a cave in the Holy Land, have themselves become the subject of controversy.

Another avant-garde biographer, the Australian Barbara Thiering, developed her own idiosyncratic approach to the Scrolls in 1992 with her controversial Jesus The Man. She claimed to have deciphered one fragment among the scrolls which revealed that Jesus was part of a devout sect of Essene Jews, at odds with the gospel writers, who therefore distorted his memory. The true Jesus, Thiering said, did not die on the cross but married Mary Magdalene, had three children and passed away peacefully around 64AD. Thiering's theory was, needless to say, rubbished by the academic and clerical bigwigs, but by that time it had become an international publishing sensation.

Whatever its provenance, the new style of religious — or irreligious — biography is "very seductive", says literary agent Derek Johns of A P Watt. "Whether people go to church on Sundays or not, the prevailing system of belief in the West remains a Christian one . . . And so taking a fresh look at Christian subjects . . . has an enormous appeal."

IT WOULD be a mistake, though, contends American publishing executive Marian Wood of Henry Holt, to think that books such as Mailer's and Wilson's will only sell to those outside the churches. "There are, granted, far more 'religous' people than those who go to church, but here in the US many of those who attend do ask questions, do listen to the evidence of science and history and do distinguish between the core of their faith and the non-residual parts of it."

Wood believes there is another element at play — the millennium. "I sometimes think it's more of an obsession with publishers than with our readers, but you can't discount a link between the current interest in these subjects and the approach of the year 2000."

However much it may gall the pillars of the ecclesiastical and academic establishment to see their territory annexed by an uninhibited breed of populist biographers, they can at least take comfort in the renewed interest that will be generated in characters whose shelf-life had hitherto seemed to have expired.

Peter Stanford's The Devil: A Biography is published by Mandarin

Fertile folk symbol

Mark Cocker

OF THE 1000 species in the plant family Aroidae, which can be found around the world, only one is native to Britain. But as if to make up for this lack of biological diversity, the solitary British Arum has compensated with one of the richest bodies of folklore associated with any of Britain's plants.

Much of it is overtly sexual and it is a fascinating measure of changing British mores that while Mrs Grieve managed a lengthy essay without mentioning the subject once in her 1930s classic, A Modern Herbal, the botanist and writer Geoffrey Grigson, working just 30 years later, positively revelled in the many innuendoes generated by this horny cousin of the lily.

Grigson unearthed 95 different country names and even a small sample of these gives a flavour of the potent imagery to which the plant gave rise: Adam and Eve, Angels and Devils, Toad's Meat, Bulls and Cows, Stallions and Mares.

Even Cuckoo-pint, one of the more innocuous-sounding and most widely used names, is not as modest as it might appear. "Pint" was a contraction of the Old English word, "pintel", whose meaning is made explicit in another of the plant's nicknames, Cuckoo Cock.

At present in Norfolk woodlands all you can see are the beautiful halberd-shaped leaves emerging through the March leaf litter. As they thrust upwards in tight scrolls, they are one of the first signs of spring. But as symbols of rebirth they are nothing compared with the flower emerging later in the season.

This bizarre and gloriously vulgar bloom consists of two parts. The outer portion, known as the spathe, is like a narrow-waisted vase widening towards the brim, where the lip curls in upon itself to form a shallow hood. From within this sheath rises a swollen spike, purplish chocolate in colour, known as the spadix.

These two portions have a function that is as complex as their structure. Spring insects are attracted by the smell of rotting flesh produced by the spadix and tumble into the sheer-sided spathe, where they become trapped by a series of downward-pointing hairs.

If they are carrying pollen then they fertilise the female flowers lying at the base of the plant, and when this takes place the male stamens mature, releasing their own pollen onto the insect, while the imprisoning hairs shrivel to allow its eventual escape.

Not surprisingly, cuckoo-pint's striking shape gave rise to a belief in its aphrodisiac qualities and it was regularly added to love potions. But it also had a wide range of practical applications. Its tubers were dried and used as a starch for clothes, as a tincture for sore throats, and even as a kind of food resembling arrowroot, while a boiled decoction was a supposed cure for dropsy and ringworm.

HOWEVER, my favourite use of cuckoo-pint is what might be described as political satire. Many of the old names given to it involved ribald references to the first two estates of medieval Europe, the spiritual and temporal establishment, and you can imagine the rustic peasants dreaming up nicknames, like Parson's Billycock, or Parson-in-his Smock, or Knights-and-Ladies, Kings-and-Queens, to poke fun at their "betters", particularly the church and its hypocritical lapses.

Giving comic names to the flowers was a subtle conspiracy between the woodsman and his wood. He invested the landscape with his own meaning and nature reflected it back to him. It was his friend and ally against a distant élite — those urban-based strangers who knew little of the countryside. But for the rural folk it was also a storehouse of their private thought and a living lexicon for their quiet subversion.



ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE 1997 Macallan Camrose series, the home international competition, was poised for an exciting finish. With one match left to be played, all four teams — England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — had a realistic chance to win the trophy.

Shortly before the final match, England suffered a major blow. Tony Forrester and Andrew Robson had decided, after almost seven years as the country's — and one of the world's — leading pairs, to go their separate ways. They announced that they would not be available for the decisive Camrose encounter.

Into the breach stepped John Holland and Michelle Brunner of Manchester. Though they have been playing together for much longer than seven years, and though Brunner is a former women's World Champion, this was as nervous a debut in the Camrose series as anyone could wish. After a shaky start, though, Holland and Brunner played a full part in a comprehensive victory over Wales. When Scotland, the holders, could manage only a draw with Northern Ireland, England had regained the trophy in splendid style.

The English pair's most spectacular success from the match could easily have turned into a disaster. Take the hand of the Welsh South player and decide what actions you would take:

♠A8 ♥AQ9853 ♦Q5 ♣K43

At game all, you open the bidding with the obvious one heart. The opponents are silent as partner responds with two diamonds, and you have your first decision. A simple two hearts does not do justice to your high-card strength and fine six-card heart suit — but the suit is not that fine, and it is possible that a re-bid of three hearts will overstate it.

Is the choice simply between two and three hearts, or is there some other possibility? The Welsh player chose three hearts at the table, but I think there is a good case to be made for 2NT. This shows the overall strength of your hand well, and allows partner room to rebid his diamonds or to volunteer support for your hearts. If he simply raises to 3NT, that contract should have good play.

After one heart — two diamonds — three hearts, the auction continued: three spades (a cue bid agreeing hearts); four hearts (you have done enough by now); five clubs (a further cue bid); six hearts. You are awaiting the sight of dummy with some anxiety when an opponent suddenly comes to life. East doubles six hearts. What would you make of that, and what action, if any, would you take?

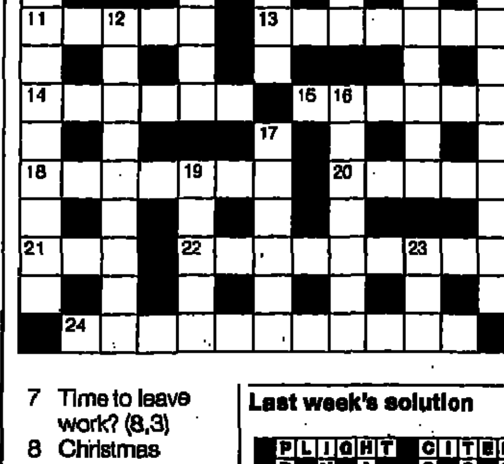
When an opponent doubles a slam that you have freely bid, the chances are that he is hoping to defeat the contract provided that his partner can find an unusual lead — the so-called Lightner double, named after its American inventor. It appears that East is hoping for a diamond ruff, in which case perhaps you should convert to 6NT. Would you follow that course at the table?

You had better, for this was the full deal:

West	North	East
	♠K52	
	♥K6	
	♦KJ98632	
	♣A	
♠973		♠QJ1064
♥J10		♥742
♦A1074		♦None
♣Q762		♣J10985
	South	
	♠A8	
	♥AQ9853	
	♦Q5	
	♣K43	

When the Welsh South passed six hearts doubled, and when Brunner led the ace and another diamond to defeat the contract, England gained 13 IMPs, for the contract at the other table was a modest four hearts. Had the Welshman converted to 6NT, however, the 13 IMPs would have gone to Wales. ©

Quick crossword no. 358



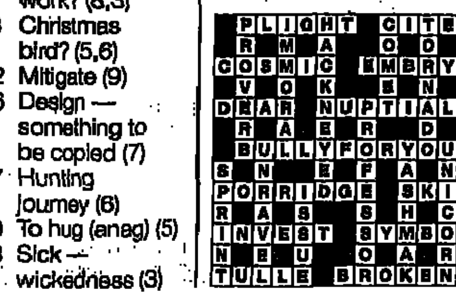
Across

1 Very possibly (5,6)
9 Serve as an example of (9)
10 Court (3)
11 Sluggish (5)
13 Tolerates — bears (7)
14 Confine to a special camp (6)
15 Put out shoots (6)
18 Venetian canal boat (7)
20 Teacher (5)
21 District in India — gazelle (3)
22 It conveys information unofficially (9)
24 Motorists' warning sign (3,8)

Down

2 Employ (3)
3 One supplying possible race winners (7)
4 Hang around (6)
5 In a state of readiness (5)
6 Very bottom (9)
7 Time to leave work? (8,3)
8 Christmas bird? (5,6)
12 Mitigate (9)
16 Design — something to be copied (7)
17 Hunting journey (6)
19 To hug (anag) (5)
23 Sick — wickedness (3)

Last week's solution



Chess Leonard Barden

NIGEL SHORT'S chances of confirming a 2,700 Fide rating, and thus rejoining the grandmaster élite which contests the world's most valuable tournaments, were dashed at Wijk aan Zee last month. A few weeks earlier, Short's published rating rose to 2,690, No 10 in the world; then he won first prize at Groningen at the turn of the year, and was promoted to top seed at Wijk after the world No 5, Ivanchuk, withdrew blaming poor form, while world No 7, Kamsky, retired from chess to become a medical student.

But Short is a notoriously slow starter. His problems at the Hoogovens Steel tournament in Wijk began in the very first round when he blundered in a won position; then he lost three in a row and could not recover. Valery Salov, the ex-Russian living in Spain, won the event while Dutch No 1, Jeroen Piket, delighted the home fans with his good form.

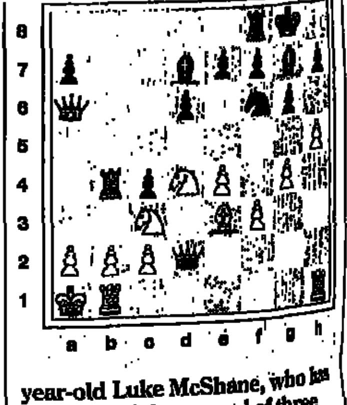
Piket-van Wely

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Be2 0-0 6 Bg5. Still a popular system 40 years after Yuri Averbakh introduced it. c5 7 d5 h6. The solid play is e6, undermining White's centre without gambitting a pawn.

8 Bf4 e6 9 dxe6 Bxe6 10 Bxd6 Re8 11 Nf3 Qb6 12 Bxb8 Raxb8 13 Qc2 Nh5 14 g3 Bh3?! Black wants to stop K-side castling, but f5 15 0-0 f4 is better. **15 Nd2 f5 16 Bxh5 gxh5 17 0-0-0 fxe4 18 Ndxe4 Bf5 19 f3 Qg6** Black's K side is wrecked and he is a pawn down, yet the bishop pair on an open board may be dangerous. **20 Rhe1 a6 21 Rd5!** It is important to stay active in such positions.

Bd4 22 Qd2 Be6 23 Rd6 Be5 24 Nd5! Resuming the initiative. If Bxd6 25 Nxd6 regains the exchange with advantage, since Rfd8? fails to 26 Ne7+. **b5 25 Rxa6 bxc4 26 Nef6+ Bxf6 27 Rexe6 Rxe6 28 Rxe6 c3** A last try, praying for 29 bxc3?? **29 Nxf6+ Qxf6 30 Qd5! cxb2+ 31 Kb1 Qf7 32 Rg6+ Resigns** If Kf8 33 Qd6+ wins.

No 2464 (see board)



McShane v Duncan, British League, Wigan 1997. Today's puzzle is a rare setback for 13-year-old Luke McShane, who has just scored the second of three master results needed to break the UK age record for the IM title. Here, Luke has launched the usual K-side attack against the Dragon Sicilian and looks poised to break through along the h-file; but his opponent, Chris Duncan, manager of the Chess & Bridge shop in London's Euston Road, launched a clever sequence as Black with a hidden idea which Luke saw too late. Can you work out what happened?

No 2463: 1 e6! Bxe6 (Rh5+ 2 Qh3) 2 Rxc5! bxc5 3 Rxc5 stops mate and wins on material.

Rugby Union Five Nations Championship: Wales 13 England 34

Crowning glory for England

Robert Armstrong in Cardiff

THE England captain Phil de Glanville insisted that none of his players had arrived in Wales thinking about the Lions tour, yet, after imperiously clinching the Triple Crown, few will have returned home without pondering their prospects of making the trip to South Africa.

When Fran Cotton's final squad is announced on April 2 it will be surprising if the England team — minus Will Carling but plus Jeremy Guscott and Will Greenwood — are not issued with 16 Lions blazers.

The Triple Crown may be a mere bagatelle in world terms but England's four-try triumph once again underlined their massive superiority over the Celts with whom they must shortly make common cause against the Springboks. While France duly completed the Grand Slam, England established a record points aggregate (141) for the championship and increased their try count to a record-equalling 15, the number they scored in 1992.

It is easy to find fault with de Glanville's highly inconsistent team, yet ambitious and challenging players such as Stimpson, Sleightholme, Guscott, Hill, Rodber and Johnson have together made England the most compelling side in the Five Nations. Once again their tries were scored in a blistering second-half salvo which on this occasion lasted 24 minutes, and yet again they left scores on the floor which could have taken them beyond 50 points.

The torrent of nostalgic blather that accompanied the appearances of Jonathan Davies, Carling and Rob Andrew could hardly disguise the brutal fact that none of them was able to exercise a crucial influence. Indeed, by the time Andrew got on, eight minutes from time, the highly focused Mike Catt had reopened the fly-half debate with an exciting performance that displayed his gifts for straight running and sharp passing. He also kicked a creditable 14 points.

England might have scored more points here had Sleightholme and Guscott not been bravely stopped by Jonathan Davies, and had Stimpson's second touchdown not been overruled by the referee.

The Welsh captain Jonathan Humphreys was too proud even in defeat to accept that their pre-match loss of six first-choice players had tilted the balance towards England. Wales denied their opponents set-piece control before the interval, and kept the half-time score down to 3-6, but thereafter the back row, without Charvis, and the backs, bereft of Gibbs, Evans and Jenkins (who fractured his arm), looked increasingly fragile.

Crucially Wales, who had two 32-year-olds, Bateman and Nigel Davies, paired at centre, lacked the explosive pace required to breach a solid English defence or to withstand the flexible, multi-skilled attacks that involved Hill, Healey, Rodber, Guscott and Underwood. This season, the France game apart, England's forwards have shown the stamina, mobility and handling to develop the interactive game with the backs that coach Jack Rowell desires.

Wales will continue their development with a North American tour this summer while England pay their first visit to Argentina since 1990.

Such are the demands of professional rugby that England's better players, who used to be notoriously late developers, must now make their mark at 22 or 23 if they intend to have a five-year international career. The shorter time-span is the main reason why Rowell has this season introduced a surprising 11 new faces into a squad that, in theory, should peak for the 1999 World Cup.

It will be intriguing to see whether the Catt-Grayson rivalry for the No 10 shirt preoccupies the Lions selectors, who must also consider afresh the merits of de Glanville, omitted from the preliminary squad of 62 last month. His 72nd-minute try completed a blitz which began with Guscott sending Stimpson over at the right flag and continued with the Bath centre side-stepping two men to create a short-range score for Hill.

Classic catch . . . the Wales centre Nigel Davies gets to grips with the England scrum-half Austin Healey PHOTO: DAVID ROGERS

Five Nations Table

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	4	4	0	0	129	77	8
England	4	3	0	1	141	63	6
Wales	4	1	0	3	94	106	2
Scotland	4	1	0	3	[illegible]	132	2
Ireland	4	1	0	3	67	141	2

France 47 Scotland 20

France in a league of their own at the finish

Ian Malin in Paris

FRANCE enjoyed a riotous farewell party at the Parc des Princes last Saturday but it is the Celtic nations who will be suffering the hangover.

The Five Nations Championship will be remembered for France's deserved Grand Slam, the fifth in their history, and an astonishing avalanche of 511 points and 52 tries. But Scotland, Wales and Ireland were ultimately buried in that avalanche. Each contrived a single, spirited win but, in the professional era, the sport's oldest competition is increasingly a contest of 'Two Nations.

Such has been the dominance of France and England, with their much larger player bases, that their three rivals may be down and out in London and Paris for a while longer. France were decimated by injuries this season, ending this competition with only five players who finished last season's in Cardiff. But they were able to introduce players of the quality of the centre Christophe Lamaison and the Pau fly-half David Aucagne seamlessly into a side who have grown in confidence throughout a triumphant three months.

Lamaison's Brive side, with their unexpected European Cup win in January, created the template around which France's Five Nations victory was drawn: physical but mobile forwards launching backs who create space with intelligent running along well-worked angles.

French backs never seem to run out of space, and the final try in a Five Nations game at the Parc summed up the philosophy of the coaches Jean-Claude Skrela and Pierre Villepreux. Jean-Luc Sadourny, France's brilliant running full-back, created the extra man in a three-quarter move that scorched across the field. It seemed to be on its last legs as the right-wing Laurent Leflamand was forced into the corner, but he was able to slip a pass inside to the flanker Olivier Magne to plunder a glorious try.

Philippe Sella, France's most capped player, has played at the Parc des Princes 30 times but said that Saturday's display was the finest he had witnessed there. "I can't remember France's backs and forwards playing so well collectively. This will be the start of a new era in French rugby," the Saracens centre said.

"They have confidence and pace in every position. Lamaison, Sadourny and Merle have been outstanding throughout the championship and Pierre Villepreux is inspiring some explosive running. The European competitions have done so much for the confidence of the national team."

Sella said that in world terms New Zealand were out on their own but France had now joined Australia and South Africa on the next level down.

Another factor helped France. Until recently self-destructive habits on the rugby pitch were as Gallic as Perrier and perfume. Not now. Defying such national stereotypes, France have learned self-discipline, and an example is being set at the top. Would England have dropped their best front-row forward in the week of such a crucial international? France did just that after the Toulouse prop Christian Califano was sent off for punching in a club game a week ago.

For Scotland, though, the afternoon was a painful one. A record defeat, compounded by Lamaison's near faultless place-kicking — he landed nine of his 10 attempts at goal — leaves Rob Wainwright's chances of leading the Lions in South Africa this summer very slim indeed.

Gavin Hastings, whose memorable try had sealed Scotland's win on their last visit here, had said before the game that his old team-mates were confident of spoiling the French party.

But valiantly though Wainwright's Bravehearts performed, their front five, Doddie Weir excepted, could not cope with the brute force of the French scrum. Alan Tait, though, did enhance his Lions prospects by scoring two tries.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Wimbledon drawn and out

WIMBLEDON'S ambition of a double appearance at Wembley this year was thwarted last week by Leicester in the second leg of their Coca-Cola Cup semi-final at Selhurst Park. The two sides drew 1-1, but Leicester went through on the away-goals rule — the first game ended goal-less — after weathering 30 minutes of extra time.

In a rousing encounter, Marcus Gayle put the Dons ahead in the 23rd minute only to see Simon Grayson equalise with a header early in the second half.

Leicester's opponents in the final will be Middlesbrough, who suffered a shock 1-0 defeat at the Riverside Stadium by Stockport County. The Second Division minnows had defeated Blackburn Rovers, West Ham United and Southampton on their way to the semi-final and it was their fourth victory on a Premiership ground. But as they had lost 2-0 at home in the first leg, it was the deficit of one away goal that ended their historic charge to Wembley.

When Leicester meet Bryan Robson's team in the final on April 16 it will be their first major Wembley occasion since losing 1-0 to Manchester City in the 1969 FA Cup final, and for the Teesside club it will be the first time that they have progressed so far.

DAVID GRAVENEY has been appointed as England's new chairman of selectors. The 44-year-old former Gloucestershire, Somerset and Durham cricketer, who has signed a two-year contract, succeeds Ray Illingworth. His co-selectors will be two former England captains, Mike Gatting and Graham Gooch.

Graveney says that his first task will be to seek the active support of groundsmen in trying to regain the Ashes this summer. He believes that there is no point in formulating a team strategy if pitches are not produced that complement the thinking.

ALEC STEWART has stepped down as captain of Surrey after five years in charge at the Oval. He cited increasing pressure both in international and domestic cricket as his reason for resigning. Adam Hollioake, who led the England A team on their successful tour of Australia in the winter, will take his place. Stewart said: "In the light of the possible England demands becoming heavier and my job of keeping wicket in the majority of Surrey games, I'm stepping down. It is in the best interests of both the club and myself, so that I can return the best results with bat and gloves."

THE death of Australian cricketer Leo O'Brien at 89 leaves Sir Don Bradman the only survivor of the Bodyline series won 4-1 by England in 1932-33.

The sporting world was also mourning the death of Wilf Wooller, the former Wales Rugby Union captain, Glamorgan cricketer and England Test selector. He died in a Cardiff hospital, aged 85. Wooller won 18 caps for Wales between 1933 and 1939 and led Glamorgan to their first County Championship success in 1948.

RYAN RHODES earned his Lonsdale belt when he scored a comfortable seventh-round victory over Del Bryan at Reading in the second defence of his British light-middleweight title. The 20-year-old from Sheffield fitted his three title fights into the space of 90 days.

JACK ROBINSON, chairman of Wigan Rugby League Club, was cleared at Bolton Crown Court of perverting the course of justice. A jury found him not guilty of trying to set up the bogus transfer of the Great Britain prop Neil Cowie in an attempt to create a libel case against a local newspaper potentially worth thousands of pounds.



Gawain Jones . . . master blaster

YOUNG Gawain Jones has given the chess world something to pawn-der over. The fast-moving nine-year-old became the youngest player to defeat an international master when he defeated Malcolm Pein in the final round of the ICI Stockton tournament, breaking the record which was set at the Australian Open in 1987 by Judit Polgar, then aged 10, who triumphed over Dolfi Drimer.